



Barindrakumar Ghose  
(as an under-trial prisoner, 1908)

THE TALE OF MY EXILE

# THE TALE OF MY EXILE

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# The Tale of my Exile

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## CHAPTER I.

### THE VOYAGE INTO THE UNKNOWN

**I**T was perhaps on the 11th of December of the year 1909. There has been a complete overhaul of things during my twelve years' exile. Yet the changes outside are not so remarkable when compared to the change in my memory. This faculty seems to have fallen into a moribund condition and can only groan at its best. All the past events have become there shadowy and uncanny images, as it were, parading in a drunken brain. Certainly one must not expect from me any ordered narration of facts in their logical relation of time and place. So I beg to be excused at the very outset, if I happen to commit the blunder of punishing Jack for the crime of Peter. My only hope is that I have Upen behind the curtain who

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promises, in case of difficulty, to whisper loudly enough into my ears; and I on my side, promise to repeat then just what he says and not fabricate any thing out of my imagination. Therefore my readers are kindly requested to consider this tale of the Andamans as the joint utterance of two tongues and to take it from me that whatever I have said therein is true and pleasant — I have not transgressed the injunctions of our *Shastras* by saying either the untrue or the unpleasant.

While in the Alipur Jail, we were lodged in the "Forty-four Degree". The Alipur Jail of those days has now been converted into the Presidency Jail. The other day on our return from the Andamans we could not recognise our ancient bed of sorrows in its present transfigured aspect of prosperity. I said, we were in the "Forty four Degree". This requires annotation, otherwise my innocent readers would not easily understand that the thing has no reference to any thermometric affair. "Forty-four Degree" means a barrack of 44 cells. These cells, although contiguous to each other, have each its separate court-yard of about 3 or 4 cubits square surrounded on all

sides by walls. To each yard there is a door closed by a single wooden leaf. And in that leaf there is an eyelet set with glass through which the guards peep into the cage and observe the doings of the two-legged animal within. Along the front of the row of cells runs another long yard which also in its turn is bounded by high walls. In this yard there is a *sentry-box*, that is to say, a small erection like a wooden chariot where the guards take rest. It is here that the white sentry with his blood-red face saunters about, rifle on shoulder, and considers the whole world nothing more than a toy. And yet these kilted, helmeted, blue-eyed watchmen are not terrible things, they appear so only when looked at from a distance. I have made friends with them later on, handled them and found them to be as harmless as our tame and innocent Pussys.

The first three or four cells of this "Forty four Degree" are called *condemned cells*, that is to say, cells for prisoners condemned to death. I and Ullas were then booked to cross to the other shore of the world, with the halter round our necks. The order of execution was dangling over

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our heads, like a dagger suspended with a fine thread. The Appeal was going on in the High Court. If the judge was just, we would have to be buried alive in the Andamans and if he was unjust we would have to think of God and swing down from the gallows. In either case the result was almost the same. All others did the jute-teasing, walked about in the yard outside at bathing and meal time, and exchanged, behind the backs of the Duennas, a few stealthy glances or a still fewer jokes—at least, indulged in grinning at each other to their hearts' content. But we two were considered already as mere birds of passage on this earth and were deprived of these pleasures. We were shut up without work night and day, we had to do our bathing and eating in that closed and fenced court yard of 4 cubits square. The only human beings we were allowed to see were the bull-like jailor Mr. Hill, a superintendent whose "visitings" were few and far between, Mr. Wilshaw, the head warder, as worn out and *wind blown* as the gouty horse of a hackney coach and a jail policeman every three hours in turn. As for natural scenery there was the



captivating little bit of blue sky, the soothing yellow and sun-lit tops of a few mango, jack, *aswatttha* and *peepool* trees peering over the walls 14 cubit high and the free wanderings of birds and their unrestrained chirpings. We did not see green grass and blossoming flowers and things like them for seven months. Excepting once I had not the opportunity to see or have the company of a familiar and friendly soul in the course of my daily routine. But I was then completely immersed in my *Sadhana* and so I could bear this dearth of love and affection, this famine to my eyes and ears. All suffering and sorrow glided down like water over an oily surface, none developed into a thorn and stuck into my bosom.

Mr. Hill was a man of tough fibre and yet loved me much. He would fain have rocked me in his arms as if I were a babe and would say, "One cannot believe that this creature has done such a monstrous deed". A new Superintendent replaced him for a few days. He had read a letter written by me to my brother (Aurobindo) about spiritual things. So he got hold of me and insisted that I must give him *Sadhana*. I was in a fix. I

tried to make him understand in all possible ways that I was a raw novice myself in these matters and had absolutely nothing to give to others. But he would not be refused. He stuck to me for some time and then when he could not get round me, became terribly wild with me. As for the head warder, Mr. Wilshaw, he was bent upon discoursing to me on "the Supreme Father in Heaven" and the "*Repentance of a Sinner.*" I respected his undaunted perseverance and listened to him with the utter humility of a devotee. I did not want to wound his feelings by disclosing to him the sort of iconoclast to whom he was preaching the love of Christ. His father had been an Engineer who it appears used to boil old rusted nails in water and give his children the *iron tonic* to drink. It was not difficult for me to understand after this the reason why the intellect of the son got so rusted. The man was a Quaker, absolutely simple but as great a bigot as could be in upholding the sanctity of Law.

It was perhaps in the beginning of December that the death sentence upon me and Ullaskar was commuted to transportation for life. That time

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when I was about to die, I did not want to die. I prayed to God with my heart and soul, "Give me back my life if only this time, I can not now die at ease and in the plenitude of the bliss that lies in the emancipation from all bondage." The soul's earnest desire does not go unfulfilled. It was perhaps why the Lord heard me. Death just grazed past me. Tiger-like it fell upon Chiru one day and carried him off from my neighbouring cell. Another day the British Lion came and broke Kanai's neck; it came again some time after and swallowed my uncle, Satyen. The Devourer came close to me, smelt my limbs like a pet cat, went round me and even prepared to pounce, but suddenly turned back and departed. Perhaps its stomach was full, as it had already feasted upon three entire patriots.

After the High Court judgment was given, we remained for about a fortnight in the Alipur Jail. Then came our turn to voyage into the unknown—to go to the Andamans. In the afternoon of the 11th of December, the ordinary convicts put on bar-fetters and, jingling them like anklets, started for Taktaghat to embark on S. S. the

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Maharaja. Everything was arranged also to take us out in the afternoon, but for some reason or other we were fed and in the usual manner put into our cells. But about 3 or 4 o'clock in the early morning there was a hue and cry—"Get up. Get up! Be ready." And in that biting cold, with a cloth that barely reached our knees, a *kurta* with half-sleeves and a turban on, we came shivering in all our limbs and sat down in rows near the gate. What a funny spectacle we must have offered then! A wooden *ticket* dangling on to an iron ring round the neck,—just like the bell that is hung on to the neck of a bullock,—feters on the legs and that apparel! We looked at each other's figure and could hardly contain our laughter. But we were still within the jurisdiction of the prison and there was no means of throwing ourselves on the ground and letting out the suppressed sentiment with which we were burdened to suffocation.

Pleasure and pain in this world are a mere matter of circumstances. What is heart-rending pain in one set of circumstances, is exactly the pleasure that is desired in another set of circum-

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stances. Take a boy of the Tagore family, trim and tidy and finely costumed, pull him down from his motor car and force on him those grotesque accoutrements in which we were, he will perhaps in shame and grief run straight to the Ganges and jump into its waters to drown himself. But for us, we were simply delighted with the thing, our soul was absolutely tired of the same monotonous routine of remaining shut up, teasing jute, getting blows from the warders and practising the austerity of forced silence. So even this masquerading, being a new thing, was really delightful to us. This voyage into the trackless ocean, into the world of topsy-turvydom seemed to us only a pleasant picnic.

When we came out of the prison, we saw awaiting us what looked like a Girls' School omnibus. The carriage had about the same dimensions, the shutters closing in on all sides in the same way, and while it moved on, it gave out a similar rumbling sound. We used to go to the Court in this very carriage. We were then the government's *Zenana*, more within the *Purda* and more invisible to the sun than the most

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respectable ladies. So we quietly got into that hole and were locked in. We drove towards the jetty, our hearts swimming in gladness. There were mounted Policemen all around. On the foot-board, on the top, on the sides of the carriage there were European sergeants. The carriage drove on shaking the streets. Something similar to what happens when a sodawater bottle is suddenly opened befell us when the carriage started and our tongues, tied for seven long months, found immediately full and free play. Words suppressed and stored up for such a long time began to shoot up like a gushing fountain, paying no heed either to sequence or to sense.

When we reached the jetty there was yet some time for daybreak. The Superintendent, Mr. Emerson, was there standing with his bike. Mounted policemen could be seen in every direction. We got on board the Maharaja, the ferry boat that was to carry us across the Black Waters. We were shoved in within a hold in the lower deck. A long chain was fixed on to the planing of that room and handcuffs were attached to it at the interval of a yard or so. All the seven

of us were made to sit down and were handcuffed in order. Then the door was locked and a sentry placed outside. Now, let me tell the names of these pioneer Andaman-goers of the pioneer Bomb case. Their fame is, of course, already world-wide and there is no necessity at all of gilding the gold or painting the lily. They were

1. Sri Barindra Kumar Ghose
2. Sri Ullaskar Datta
3. Sri Hem Chandra Das
4. Sri Hrishikesh Kanjilal
5. Sri Indu Bhushan Roy
6. Sri Bibhuti Bhushan Sarkar
7. Sri Abinash Chandra Bhattacharyya

As soon as the door was locked and we were left alone, the whole place became a regular pandemonium. In that queer position, with the handcuffs on and lying on the floor aslant on one side, some burst out in song, others raised a tremendous storm of talk and chatter, others again shook the entire ship with their sallies of jokes and peals of laughter. What a din it was, what a row ! But it bore good result. The Captain of the ship,

behind in all that. Both of them matched each other most perfectly. Grief and sorrow could not in any way approach the place where these two happened to be present. One song followed another in a continuous stream. Words that were shut up so long began to gush out interminably like fireworks. So long as we have our teeth, we do not understand their value. We did not know before what a relief it is to talk to men.

We did not know so many things and we learnt so many things during these long years in which we had to lead the life of a shuttle buffeted and bruised at every turn. The sort of worldly knowledge and experience that most of us had was not much greater than what the simian allies of Sri Ranchandra possessed. I should, of course, make an exception in favour of Hemda, who had wife and children, had had dealings with police people in connexion with his service, and who was, as it were, furnaceed and hammered into a man.

Thus singing and chatting and playing and joking we lunched for our unknown Isle. We



like a beautiful face half-hidden behind the veil. And time and anon, I and Bibhuti and Indu and Ullasda would take a spring, even with the fetters on, and try to catch a sight of the thing that mere eyes could hardly embrace.

At about two o'clock the door opened and some people entered, like pilgrims to Juggernath, with bundles and baggages and baskets. What was the matter? We learnt that they were *Bhandaris* (stewards) and came to distribute fried oats, *chuda*, chilli and salt among us. So we must live on *chuda*! Heavens, what a staggering blow it was! We asked the time and they said it was two o'clock in the afternoon. We were dumb-founded. We thought it was nine o'clock in the morning. We were so much taken up with our conversation that we had lost all sense of time. None noticed when and how the hours had slipped by without giving us the least intimation. All on a sudden volleyed out the interminable cry, "Have *chuda*," "Have *chhola*"! What the deuce did they mean? Were we horses, or were we *Bhopur Darwans* that we should munch *chuda*? "*Chuda* and that sort of thing

are oval shaped. Further to the south of the South Andaman there is a small island, called the Rutland Isle. Round about these four there lie scattered innumerable groups of diminutive islands. It will be sufficient to name some of the important ones among them. To the west coast of the North and the Middle Andaman there is the Interview Island and near the east coast of the South Andaman there are the Havelock Island and the Archipelago.

The North Andaman is 51 miles in length, the Middle Andaman 59 miles, the South Andaman 49 miles and Rutland only 11 miles. These four form the Great Andaman. About 28 miles to the south of this group lies the Little Andaman which is 30 miles in length and 17 miles in breadth.

All the islands are full of hills and forests. The land is stony and yet it is so beautiful. It has veiled half its limbs with its woodland tresses and has half submerged itself in the bosom of its lover, the wild and erratic sea. One does not know when did the lady descend for the first time to take her bath. Her bath-

ing game has not ended even to-day. Her pitcher has perhaps floated away over the dark waves, but the hill-gul is too busy with her play to take note of the thing !

The highest peak of these hills is in North Andaman. It is called the Saddle Mountain and has a height of 3000 ft.

The play of the six seasons here is very characteristic. The rains are almost always a common factor. The only other prominent season is the summer. One can hardly detect when and how the rest of the seasons peep and pass off stealthily before or behind those two. All the seasons are more or less damp with the rain excepting the summer and the few months of the temperate winter. Sometimes it is one continuous menace of masses of pitch-dark clouds ; at other times it is an alternate play of rain and sunshine—like the mingled tears and laughter of a wilful woman. Before, the rain continued for 8 months but now the period has become shorter, after the forests have been cleared to some extent. Altogether, there is no fixity about the seasons. All of them run into

each other and offer a most kaleidoscopic spectacle.

The dark waters of the sea have cleft the sides of this rocky woodland in all directions and have formed innumerable channels into it. Leaves rot here when the water goes out with the ebb tide and so malaria has found a very congenial home in this place. The armies of mosquitoes that carry that disease are simply incalculable. There is a species of mosquitoes which are very strange to look at and as big as spiders. They stand on their long and lanky legs and swing continually and swing so fast that they are hardly visible. Mosquitoes and small flies are so abundant in the forest that it is not possible for any human being to remain there for any length of time. Besides, there are leeches of which any number can be seen on leaves and grass and *Kachiu* bushes. They remain hidden when the sun shines. But a little shower is sufficient to invite them out in hundreds; they sally forth if they get only the smell of man, they drop on his head from above. The biggest type of centipede that is found here

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and also wild deer, jackals and dogs have been brought over and domesticated. These also, like us, have been transported for all their life. Fero-cious animals, such as the tiger and the bear, do not exist here at all. As for the creatures that people the ocean, there is an infinite variety of them—*conch*, *oyster*, *sail*, the *rain bow* coloured *tor-toise*—what strange forms and what variegated colours! There is a kind of fish which has ex-actly the face of a horse, another which has the bill of a crow, and yet another—the *bladder* fish—which looks like a human head. There is the “*badmash*” (rogue) fish with the appearance of a shark and the *jelly* fish, like a bit of *lim-pid* ice. The *shankar* fish is also abundant, its tail makes a very good whip. It can with a blow of its tail cut open the flesh and break the bone. The bladder fish, when frightened swells up, looking like a decapitated human head and puff- out jets of water from its mouth and stares with its eyes wide open. There is another kind of fish which in fright, throws out some inky substance to make the water turbid and escapes.

The place is not rich in natural products

Port Blair and the Nicobars grow mainly coconut trees. The forests grow also *Sal*, *Garjan*, *Padouk*, *Coco* and other trees which yield good timber. This and coconuts are the principal articles of trade. Only a small portion of this woody country is inhabited by men and under cultivation and that is Port Blair. The Government is now trying to have small establishments here and there in the Middle and the North Andaman. The rest of this archipelago is covered with dense and almost impenetrable forests. The forest Department has made a survey of these forests and has prepared maps and charts. These show the number of trees in each square mile, the location of all waterfalls and basins. Most of them have been drawn by Hemda.

The Government has a monopoly of another trade article, which is called the *Edible Bird's Nest*. The swift is a small black bird which prepares, with a saliva-like secretion from its mouth, a kind of white nest. The Edible Bird's Nest is a medicine for nervous debility. It is something like white wax, has no taste

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and is taken with milk. There is a great demand for it in China and in Rangoon.

The first use of the Andamans as a penal settlement dates from the Sepoy Mutiny. Its history, previous to that event, is quite uncertain and vague.

The name Andamans is found in the writings of the Arabian travellers, of Marco Polo, Nicolo Conti and others. The Fourth Regulation of 1797 gave the Nizamul Adalat the power to transport prisoners. At that time, the places for transportation were Singapore, Penang, Malacca, Tenasserim, and others. The first attempt to convert the Andamans into a penal settlement was made in 1788-89 under the direction of Engineer Colebrooke and Captain Blair. The penal settlement was twice established, first in the Chatham Isle of the South Andaman and then in the Cornwallis Port of the North Andaman, but on both the occasions it had to be given up, as man could not live in such unhealthy places. After the Mutiny Dr F. Mouat came and recommended the Chatham Isle for keeping prisoners. So in 1858 the new Settlement was star-

ted with rebel prisoners; ordinary prisoners began to be lodged here from 1863. In 1870 Colonel Henry Mun had the jungles and forests cleared, the ditches filled up and thus made the place tolerably healthy. Some 13000 male prisoners and from 700 to 800 female prisoners are kept here usually. The free population numbers about 2000.

The natives of these islands are a wild and aboriginal people. They remain naked and are called *Jarrauallah*. They are perfect marksmen in archery and shoot down men with arrows whenever they happen to meet one. Like the *Semang* tribe of Malay, the *Jarras* are short in stature, black in complexion, have small and well-shaped ears and possess close-cropped but curly hair. There is a tall-statured and long-haired section of the *Jarras* which is found, it appears, in the Rutland and the Interview Isle. Perhaps they are products of a mixture with some other tribe. The *Jarras* generally are  $4\frac{1}{2}$  ft high, remain naked, have almost no beard and mark their forehead with a tattoo point. They paint all their limbs with white and red earth. Their food is fish, tortoise, honey and



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wild fruits. They are a race of fighters. There is no escape from their hands when once they fix the arrow to their 6 ft long bow of hard wood. They come so silently and stealthily, like a wild beast, that they do not attract any attention. They observe from a distance and shoot the arrow with an unerring aim. There has been no truce as yet between them and the English. They remain away in the forests from fear of rifles and guns. They come now and then near the skirts and when they have taken their toll of one or two victims are driven off again. They are a monogamous race. They are very skilful in swimming. Their population is about 8 to 10 thousand.

Five years after the establishment of the settlement at Port Blair, a band of these savages came to be tamed by the English. These are no longer called *Jarras*, but *Janglis* (Savages) —the real *Jarras* never fail to kill them even, if once they see them. The Government has created some barracks for them. These *Janglis* come to the barracks with honey, tortoise-shells, sea-shells, conches, oysters and various other forest

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and sea products which they gather in their roamings. The *munsli* of the barracks gives them tobacco, tea, sugar, glass-beads or whatever they choose to have in return for their articles, which he then stocks in the godown for sale or sends to the show room. They remain for 8 or 9 days and when they have sufficiently rested, go out again to scour the forests. The men put on a *lenguti* (a band of cloth), 3 or 4 inches wide. The women wear leaves and sometimes also a kind of frilled bark or plaited fibres of some trees. This latter is of course the sign of growing civilisation. I have seen small boys and girls in the barracks whose fathers were Ooriyas or even Sahebs. There was a girl—most probably issue of a European father—who was so pretty that she did not at all look like a *Jangli*. Very often she used to throw off her clothes and other useless trappings of civilisation and run away to roam in the forests as she pleased. She could not abandon her wild nature of a free bird in the free sky.

Their language is not understandable. It has a nasal twang and is not at all rich in voca-

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bulary. They have a very thin voice. They naturally possess the sharp contralto that (European) ladies take so much pains to master and attain.

The Barrack of the janglis is near the Shore Point and there is a hospital for them which is near the Haddo station. Till now two jangli women have learnt English and have become christians. One of them is the matron of the hospital and the other is the female companion of the Chief Commissioner's wife.

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### CHAPTER III.

#### A SURVEY OF THE SETTLEMENT

I have tried to give a general idea of what sort of a thing the Prison-Island is in itself. I will now describe first the outside arrangements connected with the prison. The S. S. Maharaja goes to Calcutta at the interval of forty days to bring the convicts. During these forty days it goes once to Madras and twice to Rangoon. A

consignment despatched from Calcutta may consist, however, of Bengali, Assamese, Punjabi, Hindusthani, Orissa and Madrassee convicts. Ordinary prisoners on their arrival are landed at first in the Quarantine Camp, near Hope Town. This camp is just below Mount Harriet and is in charge of a convict Compounder and a convict Jamadar. When a fresh batch is in here, no other prisoners are admitted. The batch remains shut up in this place for two weeks. This is to prevent plague or any contagious disease from entering Port Blair. The prisoners have to lie down and sleep all these days with their fetters and other paraphernalia exactly as they come. They are also given from time to time light work, such as mowing the grass and sweeping the roads.

On the 16th day the prisoners are removed from the Plague Camp to the prison. The march to the prison is a real sight to see. Bundles and beddings are on bent backs and doubled up bodies, the fetters jingling like anklets on the legs, all the eyes quivering and staring with fear. The miserable trudge along row after row. In front and behind the red-turbanned

and so on. Those who are given oil-grinding bid adieu to sleep for that night. They are fortunate who get the work of a water-carrier or sweeper or rope-maker and heave a sigh of relief. But those who get cor-pounding are in a state of suspense, as it were, between life and death. For cor-pounding although a lighter task than oil-grinding is still not quite easy.

The convicts in this way, either in happiness or in sorrow, serve each his term of punishment and one day come out of the prison for a freer life outside. Then they are no longer the raw, timid and simple souls of old. They have suffered much, they have cheated and been cheated much, they have been trained in the hands of expert and veteran jail-birds. So even if they are not perfect rogues yet, they have made immense progress towards that ideal.

The day before they are released from the prison, a telephone is sent to the Aberdeen station and one Tindal with four or five Petty Officers arrives to take charge of them. The convicts come from the Indian prisons with *dhoti*, *kurta* and *turban*. They enter the Andaman

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prison with shorts, *kurtā* and *topi*. And when they are let off for settlement life they put on their old suit again and thus get back their old status. The chief overseer of the prison, the jailor, Mr. Barry, and the gate-keeper hand over to the Tindal outside these 70 or 80 convicts forming one batch along with their beddings, utensils and clothes. So soon as this is done, once more the cry of the guards—"Two by twos", "Stand up" and so on—startles and terrifies the poor creatures and once more they are driven, with baggage on their backs, to a *Tafoo* or station outside. Here orders of the higher authorities are already secured on the previous day and accordingly the Munshi and the Jamadar divide the whole batch into groups of 10 or 12 and send each to its assigned place.

Port Blair is divided into four Districts, (1) the Ross District, (2) the Eastern District, (3) the Western District and (4) the Jail District. The Ross Isle is the chief town and therefore forms a district by itself. The Eastern District has the following stations: Aberdeen, Phoenix Bay, Middle Point, Navy Bay, Palurh Gion



and Haddo. The special works that are given to Aberdeen convicts are road-making, goods-lading at the Jetty, stone-breaking and sweeping. They are also engaged in the Engineering Godown and in the coconut file. Phoenix Bay has a large workshop which manufactures various articles from iron, brass, conch-shells, tortoise shell and wood. Some three to four hundred people are engaged here. Besides this there are also all the usual works, such as sweeping, road-making, and other things. The Middle Point is named by the convicts *chholdari*. The convicts of this place have to do the usual works and besides some have to go and work in the garden and the Engineering Godown at Haddo. There are large vegetable gardens and fruit-gardens at Navy Bay. The convicts here have to do also repair works at the embankment. The convicts of Pahrath Gaon come to assist in these works at Navy Bay and also go to the forests to cut canes. There is also a big hospital at Haddo.

The stations in the Western District are Chatham, Shore Point, the *Jangli* Barrack,

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Dundas Point, Viper, Wimberleygunj, Kalatang and Biratang. Chatham is famous for its Saw-mill. All the timbers of the Andaman Forest Department are sawed here by machine and planks, rafters and beams are made out of them. Shore Point has a fish-gang and a coconut-gang. There is also an Engineering Godown here. The Jangli Barrack has already been described in connexion with the savage tribes of the Andamans. Dundas Point is famous for its brick-kiln. Some hundreds of convicts work here. Viper is the Chief-Town of the Western District. The District Officer has his Court and bangalow here. The chief works here are connected with the vegetable garden, the play-ground, the Hospital, the Jetty site and also bamboo and cane cutting. At Wimberleygunj there is a curd-house and a fuel pile. The jurisdiction of the Forest Department begins from this place and continues up to Biratang. Kalatang is in the midst of the deep forest. Here is the tea garden of the respectable manager Mr. Minto. This place is a terror to the convicts, for the work in the tea garden is most difficult. Baratang lies still fur-

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ther in the heart of the forest and is the chief centre of the Forest Department.

A station means a block of 6 or 7 barracks. Each station is in charge of a convict Jamadar and a convict Munshi. A convict becomes by gradual promotions in the course of 10 or 12 years a Jamadar. He then gets a red badge to which is attached a brass plate with the word *Jamadar* inscribed on it. This he slings across his shoulder, like the sacred thread. The Jamadar gets a salary of Rs. 8 a month and also daily ration. Under the Jamadar is the Tindal who has a black and red badge with a brass plate marking the designation of his position. Under each Jamadar there are 4 or 5 Tindals. Under the Tindal is the Petty Officer who has only a black badge and no brass plate. There are some 20 to 25 Petty Officers in each station.

One barrack can contain 60 to 70 convicts. It is a wooden construction with tiled roof. The floor is made of planks that rest upon posts and is a little high above the ground. It has no wall, but instead a trellis-work of wood on all

## THE TALE OF MY EXILE

sides. In that room the convicts spread their bed of gunny and blanket side by side in three or four rows and lie down. There is a water closet on one side. Each barrack has two lights. There are four Petty Officers and a Jamadar at the head. Sometimes a simple Tindal does the watching along with the Petty officers. Each has to watch for three hours in turn. The barrack is closed exactly at night-fall. But the real closing is at 8 o'clock, when the time is announced by gun-fire. After this, no one can go out. There are two roll-calls, one just at night-fall and the other at 8.

Early in the morning there is another roll-call. The Tindal comes followed by all the Petty Officers and gives the order, "Sit up, each on his bed", and then they march down the rows and do the counting, as of a flock of sheep. Thereupon the convicts come out and finish their morning *toilette*. There are several vats which the water-carriers fill with "sweet water" toiling during the whole day. "Sweet" however does not mean that the water is scented and sugared. This is a land of salt water and so

sweet water (mitha pani) means nothing but drinking water. Each convict has to go with an iron can to a water-carrier who doles out the water in a small tin-mug.

Then again they are made to sit down two by two. The poet Shelley wrote Love's Philosophy in which he said, "Nothing in the world is single." In Port Blair the Petty Officers and Tindals are ever eager to demonstrate this Love's Philosophy by sheer blows. One has to hear at all sorts of hours, in the day and in the night, when one is up and when one is down, this eternal cry, "Be in couples". If you rebel, you have forthwith the bludgeon on your back or belly or some appropriate place or other. These people are such expert mathematicians that they cannot count unless the men sit in couples. They are proceeding with the counting marvellously enough, shouting at the top of their voice "one, two, three" but suddenly if at the end of the 10th pair they come across a poor fellow sitting alone and single, all is thrown into confusion. Blows and kicks are showered profusely upon the miserable sinner,

## THE TALE OF MY EXILE

until he is paired with somebody. The counting then begins again afresh.

The convicts of all the barracks are gathered together in this morning review. And when the "all right" report is given, the Jamadar and the Munshi divide them in files in accordance with the works of the Station. That is to say, the Jamadar separates a group of some 10 or 12 from one side of the entire lot in review and hands them over to the charge of, say, the Engineering Foreman. The Munshi notes the thing down immediately. And this is called the P.W. D. File. Again some thirty are taken out and are given over to the man in charge of the garden. The Munshi as usual makes a note in his book. And this is the Garden File. Now the men-in-charge take their respective groups to the various centres of work, apportion to each individual his work and keep him engaged till 10 o'clock. After 10, there is again the commotion of "falling in", of counting and recounting and of returning to the Station. At the Station the Jamadar counts again and receives back his charge. Then follows bathing and dinner

## A SURVEY OF THE SETTLEMENT

and rest up to 1 o'clock in the afternoon. Then one has again to be present at the *filig*, to group under his Tindal or Petty Officer and start for the work. The dismissal comes at about 4 or 5 o'clock. At five all the men sit down for meat in a long line, each with a plate and a cup (*bati*) in front. Till night-fall one is allowed to walk near about the station and talk and make merry freely.

The time from after the morning meal at 10 till the files go out in the afternoon is the moment for the gunja-smoker to have a secret puff or two. It is the auspicious hour for the gambler. It is then that the money-seeker gets his opportunity of earning, by fishing, gathering betel in the forest, and by a thousand other devices. This is also the time when the men flock round the particular divinity whom they want to propitiate—whether it be the Jamadar or the Munshi, or the Tindal or the Ration-mate, each now receives his quota of worship in the shape of flattery and other offerings from his group of protégés.

There is no work on Sunday. One has only to clean and sweep the place about the station

## THE TALE OF MY EXILE

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## THE TALE OF MY EXILE

for an hour or two in the morning. You may be down on your bed the whole day. Or if you like you may try to gain the good graces of the officer in charge of your barrack by offering him sweet words or still sweeter coins and go over to some other station to see a friend of yours.

This is in general terms the life outside the prison.

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## CHAPTER IV

### THE BEGINNINGS OF THE CELLULAR LIFE

OUR ship arrived in the harbour. On the north lay the Ross Isle, on the south the Aberdeen Jetty and the Cellular Jail looming like a huge fortress, on the east Mount Harriet with its green luxuriance and on the west the infinite perspective of the sea. Where did we come at last to anchor in this shoreless expanse? Should we, when we had lost all moorings, find ourselves always thus again

## THE BEGINNINGS OF THE CELLULAR LIFE

ashore? Perhaps it was not the harbour that we sought for and yet Nature appeared there in such a beautiful and captivating aspect! The Ross Isle looks from the bosom of the harbour like a veritable landscape painting. On the hill-side at various levels lies in natural negligence, as it were, the red and the white buildings intermixed with the green of the trees and woods. Those of my readers who have seen Shillong from a distance may form an idea of the picture. The only difference is that in the present case there is the profuse abundance of the liquid blue round about the hills, the passionate heaving of the naked bosom of the wild sea. The sombre Jetty touches the waters of the Ross. Above, the buildings rise, tier upon tier, along a meandering path and half-veil themselves in the woods. At the top is the Bangalow of the Chief Commissioner, of which the red-tiled roof can be noticed from a distance. The Union Jack flies over the place and is taken down only when the official is absent. There is a barrack of British troops in the western corner of the Ross, almost in the em-

## THE TALE OF MY EXILE

brace of the sea. A sky-scraping post is planted here which carries a red flag at the top whenever it is required to announce the coming in of a steamer. Also it is meant to be decorated with festoons of flags and ensigns on all State occasions such as the celebration of the king's birthday.

The highest peak in the Andamans is named Mount Harriet. It is the summer residence, that is to say, the Simla Hills of the archipelago. There are many Bangalows on the top of this hill. The Chief Commissioner and other officials come here and spend some weeks during the hottest part of the summer or whenever they are in any way indisposed. When we were in the Andamans we found the State prisoners of Manipur kept here. The Government had granted them free lodgings and even lands, also monthly allowance and duly ration. They were released later on by the King's Proclamation on the occasion of the Peace celebration. Mount Harriet is all covered with dense woods. It seems as if a shaggy bear is sleeping quietly, hiding its muzzle within its paws. The woods have in

## THE BEGINNINGS OF THE CELLULAR LIFE

some places the deepest blue colour, at other places where there are neem and bamboo and tamarind trees they look like a mosaic of light yellow and again in some places they are red with the copper-coloured leaves. A stream has burst open the hard bosom of the rocks and flows down like a current of silver. It embraces the foot of the hill and trips forward with a gurgling music to meet the ocean.

A steam launch dragged a *lighter* for us and lay by the ship. The Senior Medical Officer, the Jailor and various other officers came and went away. All around there was rushing and whirling of motor boats, canoes, lighters and steam-launches. Now, before I proceed further I should give here some idea of the Cellular Jail, otherwise my innocent readers might lose themselves in a labyrinth of confusion in trying to follow me.

Picture the Jail as a sort of map in the centre of which there is a point. This point represents a three-storied pillar or minaret. It is the Central Tower or *Goonth*. The circumference of a circle drawn round this centre re-

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presents the outer wall of the Jail. From the Central Tower seven straight lines or radii are drawn in different directions to join the circumference. These seven radii represent the seven blocks of the prison. Like the Central Tower, the blocks also have all three stories. In each story there is a suite of some twenty or thirty rooms. Each room has a door closed by iron bars only, with no door leaf. On the back of the room, at a height of 4 cubits and a half, there is a small window, closed also with iron rails two inches apart. Of furniture in the room there is a low bedstead 1 cubit and a half wide and in one corner an earthen pot painted with tar. One must have a most vigilant sleep on such a bed, otherwise any the least careless turn would land the sleeper with a bang on the floor. And the turred pot is a most marvellous invention to produce equanimity of soul with regard to smell, for it is the water-closet and one has to share merrily its delightful company during

in all 84 people share among themselves this pleasing duty of passing a sleepless night. There is a sentry in the *Central Tower* who moves like some planetary body continually up and down the stories. When he comes near a block the warder on watch there shouts and reports "20 cells locked, four warders, all right. Now, there is no love lost between the sentry and the warder. Because if the warder happens to sit down or place his lantern on the ground, the sentry is sure to report the matter and get him punished. So the poor warder, in his fearful anxiety to win the favour of the sentry *sahib*, takes recourse to so many tricks and contrivances and gestures and attitudes that even half of them, had they been known to Menaka, Rambha and the other courtesans of Paradise, would have been quite sufficient to annihilate the whole race of the Munis and Rishis.

Each block has a large courtyard in front. And each courtyard has a workshop where the prisoners work during the day. On one side there is also a cistern about 1 cubit wide and 10 cubits long to hold water and near by a latrine

## THE BEGINNINGS OF THE CELLULAR LIFE

made of corrugated iron. There is a pumping-machine outside the jail in the garden near the sea and a little farther a huge cistern. This cistern is filled with sea-water by the pump. That water is again carried by means of pipes to the several smaller cisterns inside the seven blocks. This water is meant for bathing and washing. Drinking-water is supplied from a pipe near the Central Tower. The water-carriers of each block take the *sweet water* from there and store in tins and buckets.

Surrounded with policemen and sentries we descended from the ship and took our seat in the *lighter*. Then the steam launch carried us towards the Aberdeen Jetty. We landed here and started in marching order up the steep slope—like a herd of camels—howing down under both a physical and a mental weight and dragging our fetters always on our legs. We arrived, almost falling prostrate at the huge gate of the Cellular. We passed by the offices and godowns that were on either side of the gate. We crossed the outer gate and then the inner. Here the gate-keeper counted and enrolled us,



## THE TALE OF MY EXILE

and then finally we entered into this strange harem. The account which was thus opened in our names, was to be closed only after 12 years. We were banished indeed, even as Sri Ram Chandra, with this advantage on our side that we had no faithful Sita Devi to cook our food. Neither had we a docile and devoted brother like Lakshman nor the army of monkey friends to secure us ripe plantains. Besides, Sri Ram Chandra was punished only with simple deportation whereas our fate was to undergo rigorous imprisonment. So if the sheer weight of punishment were taken into consideration we should stand as far bigger avatars than Ram Chandra. If anybody does not admit this, I would earnestly request him to pay a visit to Mr. Barry's kingdom and do the oil grinding and coir pounding for a week only. One week would be sufficient to make him feel what an other avatar felt on the cross. If he remained two years he would begin to grow his wisdom tooth anew. And if he could pass twelve years he would be disabused of all doubts as to whether by beating an ass you can turn him into a man. At least

## THE BEGINNINGS OF THE CELLULAR LIFE

I, for one, have never come across anything that gives as much direct knowledge as a sojourn in transportation. Jestings apart, as a matter of fact, such ordeals alone are pregnant with the blessings of God.

We crossed the gate and stood in a file near the garden. It is here that we had for the first time a full view of Mr. Barry. The goat does not fear the tiger half so much as the prisoners feared this king of the Black Waters. Mr. Barry was fat and short. His ghee-fed belly put to shame even the paunch of a Marwari. He had a flat and crimson nose. The eyes were round and the moustache prickly, that gave him something like the look of a blood-thirsty tiger. He came and delivered a long speech, the gist of which was as follows. "You see the wall around, do you know why it is so low? Because it is impossible to escape from this place. The sea surrounds it for a distance of 1000 miles. In the forest you do not find any other animals than pigs and wild cats, it is true, but there are savages who are called Janglis or Jarrawallas. If they happen to see any man, they do not

## THE TALE OF MY EXILE

hesitate to pierce him right through with their sharp arrows. And do you see me? My name is D. Barry. I am a most obedient servant to the simple and straightforward but to the crooked I am four times as crooked. If you disobey me, may God help you, at least I will not, that is certain. Remember also that God does not come within three miles of Port Blair. The red turbans you see there are warders. And those in black uniform are Petty Officers. You must obey them. If they happen to molest you, inform me. I will punish them.

Then our fetters were broken. A halspint, a kurta and and a white cap were provided for each. This was the stage-dress for this Andriaman Play and as actors we had no other recourse but to caricature ourselves in that way. But with my lean and tall and sickly figure—the most anatomical of the whole lot—donning that clownish accoutrement, I was shown off most to advantage. Out of shame I began to pray, ‘Mother-Earth, hast thou forgotten that gesture of thine in the Treta Yuga? Cleave thyself once more that I may hide my shame strick-

## THE BEGINNINGS OF THE CELLULAR LIFE

en face. I am not indeed the daughter of King Janaka but my modesty is no less imperious than hers." But the mother did not open her bosom and we proceeded in that state to take our bath. And there whatever modesty was still left to us, we had to renounce absolutely. The *langoti* we were given to put on while bathing could not in the least defend any modesty. Thus, when we had to change our clothes we were in as helpless a condition as Draupadi in the assembly of the Kauravas. We could only submit to our fate. There was no help. We hung our heads low and somehow finished the bathing affair. Then I understood that here there was no such thing as gentleman, not even perhaps such a thing as man, here were only convicts! Each of us was given an iron plate and an iron dish, red with rust and smeared with oil. These could not be cleansed at all. With all our efforts we succeeded only in coating them with a thick paste of the punt and the oil that clasped each other in an inseparable embrace. However, we rubbed our hands on the grass and sat down to eat. The menu was a small

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tin can-ful of rice, a bit of *Arahar* dal and two *rotis* That even tasted nectar-like to us, after we had lived on *chuda* and *chhola* for four days *à la mode kholla*\*

When we had finished our meal, we were taken to Block No. 5 and locked in separate cells, at the interval of 3 or 4 cells. We were lodged in the Upper Corridor, the whole of which had been vacated beforehand, so that there might not be any communication between us and the ordinary convicts. Usually the warders who kept guard were changed everyday. But in our case the twelve warders that came to Number Five to watch over us were confined there. They were never transferred. Even the water carrier and the sweeper were not allowed to step outside. The warders and Petty Officers were specially chosen for us. They were all Pathians, except one only who was a Burmese. Now, when they shoved us into the rooms and locked us in, we too laid ourselves flat at our ease and having nothing else to do began to count

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\* The low class people of U. P. & Behar, as nicknamed in Bengal

## THE BEGINNINGS OF THE CELLULAR LIFE

the beams and rafters. Sometimes perhaps a voice in our inmost being hummed almost inaudibly in the plaintive words of Radha, "Dear sister, to whom, alas ! shall I tell my tale of sorrow ?"

There were 26 cells in each corridor of Number Five. So in all there were 78 cells or rooms in the three stories. The cells were distributed as follows in the respective Blocks :

Serial Number of the Block	Number of cells in each line	Total number
1	35	105
2	35	105
3	52	156
4	22	66
5	26	78
6	20	60
7	40	120

The total number of cells in the whole jail was 690. There is no barrack here for the prisoners. There are only cells and hence it is called the Cellular Jail.

The Superintendent of the Jail, Captain

## THE TALE OF MY PRILE

Murray, came at about 1 or 2 o'clock in the afternoon. He stopped for a while in front of each of our closed cells and took a preliminary survey of us. He was clean-shaved, short-statured, blue-eyed and, it appeared to me, infinitely cunning. Sometime in the meanwhile a blacksmith had come and suspended to our necks what may be compared to the bell of a bullock. In all the prisons, here as elsewhere, the convicts immediately on their entrance lose their names and are given numbers instead. Each has to carry a wooden piece, 3 inches long, 2 inches broad and 1 inch thick on which his number, the section under which he is convicted, the date of conviction and the term of sentence are written. It is called the neck-ticket and there are three kinds, the rectangular, the circular and the triangular. Prisoners under section 302 (that is to say, murder) get the first variety. Dacoits and political prisoners get the second variety. And those who attempt to escape from Port Blair or are caught again after escaping get the third variety. The ticket is suspended to an iron ring put round the neck. In the prisons of Madras,

the number is carved in tin and attached to the kurta, near the breast like a decent brooch ; but in Port Blair one has to mimic the bullocks.

At four in the afternoon we were unlocked and taken to the yard. We bathed, we washed and arranged our respective plates and dishes on the ground and came back again into our cells. The band of cooks then appeared and served rice, *dal* and *roti*. We came out after they had left and sat down to eat. Ordinary prisoners after finishing their day's work, bathe and sit down in file and get themselves served. But we had no such liberty. It was the first Bomb case in the Andamans and we were the first batch of Anarchists there. We were dreaded more than a pack of wild wolves. So there was so much strictness about us, so much flourishing of lock-and-keys and rules and regulations. But nobody took account of how much we too on our side were shaking with fear, how much we too were anxious to save our lives. At that time our position as regards each other—we on the one hand and the officers of the Jail on the other—was most funny. They looked upon us



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with fear and apprehension, we too remembering the motto that trust should not be placed in royal personages harboured the same feeling towards them. Again they were very busy to conceal their feelings in order to keep their prestige. They bluffed and bullied, put on a reckless, devil-me-care attitude in the exterior. Likewise we too were intent upon upholding the name of patriot and sought self-gratification by delivering long speeches to them in season and out of season. From the jailor down to the smallest peon, everybody brandished law before our nose at every step, showed red and wrathful eyes, even tried to chase us, but all that was due to the instinct of sheer self-preservation. For they argued in their minds, "The fellows are rogues and ruffians, suppose they bring about some mischief." We also flared out in one moment and in the next turned as meek as lambs. That too was because we had no other way out. For one did not know, whether if, in this land of lawlessness, we gave up even hassing (along with biting)—as the saying goes—it would be possible at all to keep body and soul together.

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The next morning we came out and washed our faces and then had for the first time the *darshan* of *ganji*, otherwise called *kānji*. It means boiled rice churned in water—one may say, a sort of rice-porridge. We were given each a *dabbi* full of this dainty. *Dabbi* is a kind of primitive spoon, made of a broken half coconut shell with a cane-handle fixed to it. Now, the *Ganji* was saltless and therefore tasteless. Each prisoner was allowed only 1 dram of salt per day and, this being required for the *dal* and the vegetable, the *Ganji* had necessarily to go without salt. However, we had to swallow the thing with the utmost perseverance, in spite of its tastelessness. The same thing was called *Lapsi* in the Alipur Jail, but there it had some taste, as it was prepared sometimes with molasses and sometimes with *dal*. We had been shut up 7 days in quarantine; but now came the turn of real medical examination in the Hospital. And this was to decide the fate of the prisoners. Mr. Murray examined each and wrote down on the Jail History sheet whether he was fit for hard or light labour, such as, "good physique

## THE TALE OF MY EXILE

fit for hard labour," or "Poor physique, fit for light labour". Then the jailor M. Barry was to go through these remarks and distribute work to each. Between the examination and the distribution of work we passed seven days in making ropes out of coir.

One batch of prisoners had to soak the coir in water, pound it and get fibres out of it. From these fibres ropes were made by another batch, viz, those who were given light labour. Each had to turn out 3 lbs weight of ropes.

We had never done rope-making or coir-pounding in our life. Even perhaps our ancestors to the fourteenth generation had never heard the names of such things. And yet we did the thing. On the first day all of us were given rope-making. A bundle of coir was thrown in front of each of the closed cells with the command, "*Rassi Batlo*", that is to say, prepare ropes like a dear good boy. We opened our bundles, handled them a little and finally sat down in despair. To make ropes out of that? Was it possible? There were the four warders there. They came as private tutors to teach us

this dreadful work. Now let me repeat the lesson to my readers. First twist the fibres into wicks by rubbing them upon the ground with the palm of both the hands. When in this way there is a huge pile of wicks, put it on one side. Then take out two wicks. Hold one end of both wicks firmly on the ground together with your toe and then press the other ends between your palms. Use your fingers skilfully and twist the two together, till they make a small rope. Then repeat the process by joining other two bits of wick to the two ends and twist again. And so on. As the rope becomes longer and longer, you throw it behind you and hold the last joint under the toe and join again another wick and twist. This is called rope making. I now tell it in words and this is not so difficult. But to do the thing actually is such a Herculean task in the beginning that only those who have undergone the trial know what it is. However, this was our maiden effort and what wonderful ropes we made, narrow at one place, thick at another, and all covered with bristling fibres! Not to speak of the honorable Government, we our-

of Prison and I could only gnash my teeth and pocket the insult !

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## CHAPTER V.

### THE REIGN OF KHOYEDAD KHAN IN NUMBER FIVE

WE remained ten of us together in Number Five, closely guarded for about six months. A batch of Madrassé prisoners had also come with us at the same time when we left Quarantine after a detention of seven days. They too, for want of room, were locked up in Number Five and prepared ropes in our company. Of them Nagappa and Chinnappa were our particular friends. Nagappa was a barber by caste and profession. Chinnappa was the youngest of the lot. He was quite a harmless little boy, liked very much by every one of us. All these Madrasses helped us in rope-making and made easy for us what was an almost impossible task. They were released after six

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months Chinnappa then became independent and self-supporting and took service under the Hospital Assistant. Nagappa was soon to be called to the other world.

Soon after this batch of Madrisees were let off and sent outside in the settlement, in other Burmese consignment, convicted under Sec 121, came and replaced them in No 5. Sec 121 means treason. The Fungis or the priests of the Burmese have the habit of setting up every now and then a false king (Thibaw) and exciting the mob to attack and ransack police stations. Thus was also the crime of the new batch who were made almost our bed companions. Indeed, it was the first time that we saw these white skinned people with an almost feminine appearance, having neither beard nor moustache, but not without the *ulki* on the forehead (which the gentler sex only put on in our parts). Some of them happened to know Hindi. However, now we became their masters in rope-making, and they our disciples. Many of them had to do cor-pounding also. And in both of these arts we had the supreme satisfaction of pos-

ing as Gurus to a band of ignorant neophytes. Helpless and easily susceptible to gratefulness, they too became great Bhaktas to us. By this time we had somehow got ourselves accustomed to the mellifluous jawbreaking words of the Madrasees, such as "Aya Swami", "Ingeva", "Rundu Rundu Po" and so on ; but now we had again to face bravely this novel nasal language of the Burmese. It took us some time before we could pick up even a few common phrases that were absolutely necessary and there we stopped

When we had passed about six months in this way, Captain Murray left for England on two years leave. We learnt that he was going in search of a goddess to fill the emptiness of his hearth and home. We were very comfortable while he was in the Andamans. We were never given any work more difficult than compounding. We found the rigours of a lonely and desolate life somewhat softened when he used to come and talk to us smilingly and pleasantly. Compared to the blusterings of Mr. Barry, his was a mere mild rebuke. However whatever

## THE TALE OF MY EXILE

suffering we had to undergo was perhaps entirely due to our destiny. No individual person could be held responsible for that. All credit should be given to the Jail Regulations only and perhaps to a wilful God.

The orders of the Jailer were that the Bomb Prisoners should not be allowed to talk to one another. So we were kept separate at all times, in all places and in every possible way. *But it was not a very easy task to keep separate 10 people who lived and moved in such a narrow place as Number Five.* But there appeared a Petty Officer who sought to accomplish the miracle. He was Khoyedad Khan, a Pathan, by race. We ten were all Hindus. There was an apprehension that Hindu guards might sympathise and fraternise with us. Therefore all the masters of our fate, the Petty Officers and warders, were chosen from among the Mahomedans, either Hindusthani, Punjabi or Pathan. A Pathan is what we know ordinarily as a kabuli fruit-seller. But in Port Blair they form the Myrmidons of King Yama. Ask them to capture a man, they will bring his head. Lazy and slothful



from his office for Jail-inspection there arose everywhere a stir and commotion. The convicts would sit up, full of anxiety and trepidation, in their respective places and try to put on the most innocent and lamb-like look. The warders and even the Petty Officer stood breathless, ready to lift up their hands in salute. Mr. Barry came every evening to lock up the wards and had a round in the Central Tower. As he stood in front of each ward, it greeted him with the shout "*sarcar*". All the prisoners jumped up and stood at attention and the warders and the Petty Officer rendered a right military salute. It was a perfect Kaisarian affair. Now, if the whole lot stood up simultaneously, the thing passed smoothly and all could sit down happily on receiving the order, "*baith jao*" (sit down). But if any or some happened to break the simultaneity, by standing up a little after the others, then woe unto the day! The orders resounded "*Sarcar*", "*Baith jao*" again and yet again and we had to repeat the exercises till we almost fainted. I have never heard the roar of a Titan or a Demon, but however that may be

## THE TALE OF MY EXILE

losophy only. You had to act like marionettes at every step. At the word of command "*khanda ho jao*" (stand up), you must stand stock still. At the next order "*kafda utaro*" (take off your clothes) you must throw off your clothes and have only a *lungi*. And again when the order comes "*pani ho*" (take water) you must take water in your cups and pour on your heads. That was the bathing ceremony. The latrine going ceremony was also conducted in the same style. You had to sit in couples in a row facing the latrine and then, as the order sounded, to enter it in batches of 8 or 10. In the meanwhile you had to practise self control. But perhaps the most intricate ceremony was the evening parade. You sat first of all in pairs. Then at the interval of two pairs of the *Bombers* there were placed two or three pairs of Burmese or Madrassie convicts. Besides, you must be paired also with either a Burmese or a Madrassie. But even so placed, we managed to evade the notice of the khan and shyly, like a newly married bride, whisper to each other.

When it was time for Mr Barry to start

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## THE TALE OF MY EXILE

I am perfectly sure that it is simply the cooing of a dove in comparison with Mr Barry's terrible cry. If anybody doubts my assertion, I would only wish that he had committed a political decoity and gone to Port Blair to hear the thundering of that mighty hero, while he was hale and hearty. But now it is too late. It is difficult to describe the thing. I can only say in the words of the Kishi that "some hear it and wonder, others hear it and do not comprehend." It must not be concluded from this, however, that I say anything in disparagement of Mr Barry. Murderers, decoits, ruffians and rogues from all the quarters of India collect together in the hundreds of prisons that are spread over the country. And the pick of that company find asylum in Port Blair. So a diamond like Mr Barry was absolutely necessary to cut such diamonds. If the present prison-system is continued and if the prisoners are to be kept under control by threats and severities, then there is no other way but to have recourse to the principle of counteracting poison by poison. But as for us poor people, the antidote is incarnated

in Mr. Barry was a little too strong. No doubt we played at throwing bombs, but was that any reason that we should be given over to living Death itself ?

However, Mr. Barry was sufferable. But Khoyedad in addition was too much. Life became simply miserable. In the afternoon our persons as well as clothes were searched and a bell was rung three times to indicate the time of the ceremony. In other wards with the ringing of the bell, the prisoners had to stand up as soon as the order *khara ho jao* was given and lay by their clothes for search. With the order *utha leo* they took up the clothes ; and they sat down when ordered *baith jao*. But the system-loving Khoyedad improved upon that business with a thousand intricacies. The first order was *khara ho jao*, the next was *sudha ek line se khara ho jao* (stand up in a straight line), then *kapra nlaro* (remove cloths), then *hanth me rakho* (hold in your hands), then *kadam uthao* (hold one leg up) and finally *rakhi deo* (place on the ground). At the first order we stood up. At the second, we approached each other and formed

a line. At the third, we took off our *kurtas* and caps. At the fourth we held out our hands. At the fifth we stood on one leg, as if about to dance. And at the sixth we put the other leg forward and placed the clothes on the ground. If the whole thing was gone through in perfect order then the *khan sahib* beamed with delight—his whole forest of whiskers radiant with the glow of his row of crooked teeth—and cried out in joy "Bravo, heroes!" We too, on our side, out of the dire necessity of self-protection, parted our lips and grinned smilingly in thankfulness hoping by that to secure his favour. Thus we had to execute all sorts of orders and then sit down and wait eagerly for the *hual bell* when we would go back to our respective stables, free at last, for the night, from the too loving clutches of the *khan*!

One could hardly ever make a rope to the satisfaction of the *Sahib*. He would take up the rope in his hands and say, "Too thick. Aren't you ashamed of it?" Or when he examined a coil he would turn up his nose and remark, "It is not clean; go wash and dry." There was no-

thing in the world we were not prepared to do in order to please the Khan Sahib. But even he found his match in Mr. Barry. When the latter proceeded towards the jail, our Khan would begin to murmur the sacred name, "*Bismillah*." He was reputed a Mullah and Namaji (one who regularly did the prayers) among the prisoners. We extolled his religious fervour and expressed our ambition to become one day Mussalmans. We appreciated his noble heart and his marvellous power of ruling men. The Khan, as he heard us, would go almost into an extatic trance. I and Abinash were in the *convalescent gang* and every one who was put in this list got 12 oz. of milk. But I secretly offered the Khan from time to time the milk allotted to me. He would at first hesitate a moment or two and then drink it off with evident delight. He would then caress his beard, smack his lips and say, "*Iah Bismillah*! what a wonderful thing God has created!" It is needless to say that this milk was a bribe—an offering to appease the wrath of this camel-eating Kabuli *Durvasa*.

Mr. Barry was stern and grim and yet

kindly to us. Every morning when he went his rounds and every evening at the lock-up time, he came sauntering along with a Burma cheroot in his mouth and a stick in his arm and had a few minutes talk one by one with all of us. He understood and we too understood that because of this favour he showed us, even the Petty Officers and the warders changed their attitude. The sahib talked and joked on equal terms with us, so we must be somebody ! It was owing to this prestige of ours that we escaped much indecent insult and abuse and beating. But as for the common convicts these things were their natural and inalienable rights. We only looked from a distance and trembled at the amount of chastisement that the poor people had to quietly digest. With the Jailor and the "superdout" we could talk English continuously "like water" and so our little masters were filled with respect for us, and did not readily lift their weapons to strike us.

Mr. Barty had a daughter, named Catherine. His wife was born lame, one of her legs being shorter than the other. He used to bring them



## THE REIGN OF KHOYEDAD KHAN

with him now and then and show them over the Cellular Zoo with all the queer animals like us that were in it. We then tried to put on the best appearance and stand smilingly before the ladies in that clownish apparel of ours. Mr. Barry perhaps believed in his innocence that he was really doing us a great favour. We only knew the shame of it all !

Golam Rasul was at that time the munshi who had to make a report of the work turned out by each convict. He was another wonderful creation of God's—a black, sickly, ugly, long-toothed and most obedient and faithful dog of the Sahib. He never did the nasty business of bathing and the smell that his body emitted made it impossible for anybody to stand near him. When he first came into the Jail, the Bara Sahib one day learnt the thing and ordered 4 or 5 sweepers to give him a bath. Once the order was passed, there was no escape from it. So they got hold of him and threw him into a cistern. He was rubbed and cleaned with coconut fibres and such a bath he had that it almost cost him his life. This affair became a perennial joke

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with the prisoners whenever they wanted to tease and play with him. Rasul was incomparable in grimacing and gnashing his teeth. One day Upen was found fault with, because of his bad rope-making and the reprimand accompanied by necessary (and perhaps unnecessary) facial gestures that he got then made him an eternal enemy of Rasul. This creature caused numberless people to be punished. There were many outside the prison in the several stations, who yet remembered how they had been tortured with handcuffs and fetters at his instance and who were still lying in wait just to "see" him when he came out dismissed. But the dearest favourite of Mr. Barry was cunning enough and did not come out. He was a warder at first, then became Petty Officer and then Tindal; and finally as Jamadar he still continued his overlordship within the Jail itself.

With Khoyedad, Golam Rasul and Mr. Barry—this holy Trinity over our head we passed very happily indeed our days! We passed about a year in this way in Number Five. In the meanwhile Hemda, Indu and some

others had once to take up the sickle and cut the grass of the yard. My Babu readers might shudder at the idea of a gentleman cutting grass ; but as a matter of fact the work of a gardener, a sweeper or even a scavenger was considered as a high privilege in this kingdom of topsy turvydom. We have seen many *kavasthas*, *chhatris* and even Brahmins petitioning for the work of a scavenger, out of the dread of oil-grinding. The people who were given those works could, at least, move about freely. Also the work being light and finished quickly, they enjoyed complete repñse for the rest of the day. So it must be admitted that Mr. Murray was unusually kind in putting a sickle in the hands of the Bomb prisoners and letting them free in the yard. Over and above that, his orders were that the grass was to be cut only when there was no rain or sun. So most of the time we enjoyed perfect leisure and squatted at ease on the veranda of the timber workshop. Only if a passing cloud came and covered the sun for some time we would go out to our work. There was to be absolute rest also during the rains. And, in the

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Andamans it was either rainy or sultry for most of the time the whole year round

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### CHAPTER VI\*

#### THE STRIKE

AS soon as we reached the prison of the Black Waters, those of us who were Brahmans were deprived of their sacred thread. There is no rule to this effect in the prisons in India, but in the Andamans that was the practice. The prison is like the holy place of Jagga-nath. Here all caste distinctions are clean wiped out. None, however, dares to touch the beard of the Mussalman or the hair of the Sikh. But everybody is only too prompt to take away the thread of the Brahmin. The reason is, of course, that the Mussalman and the Sikh are fire eaters, while the Brahmin is a meek lamb. However, we cast off that impotent weapon of Brahminhood and lost ourselves in the general crowd.

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\* This the following two chapters and the 11th form *Open story*

## THE STRIKE

The most strange thing was that not a single Brahmin raised any objection. Those who are accustomed to take beating passively are precisely the persons whom every one feels an itching to beat. Long after, a Panjabi Brahmin, by name Rama Raksha, protested in the matter. He told the jailor that his religion forbade him to take food or water unless he had the sacred thread. So he could neither eat nor drink if the thread was taken off. He had travelled over China, Siam, Japan and did not seem to have any orthodoxy about caste. But here he fought for a principle. But who would care to listen to the weak? His thread was taken away, as a matter of course and he too stopped eating. When he had fasted for four days without even taking a drop of water, he was forced to take in milk by means of the stomach pump.

A strike movement was then brewing in the prison. Ram Raksha was taken up in it and worked himself up to the pitch of quarrelling with the authorities. He had been physically in a broken down condition before he came to the Black Waters from a Burma prison. Now symptoms

of Phthisis appeared. He was removed to the Phthisis ward and soon had the good fortune of escaping the tortures of prison-life by escaping those of earthly life altogether.

However, we had not the courage to find relief by death. Not only we did not die, but we resolved to live and live upon prison food. It was not a less creditable thing to do even that. The Rangoon rice and the thick and tough *rotis*, one could somehow suffer, but it would be the rarest thing to find a single Bhadrolog boy even in these days of famine who would not shed tears over the wonderful preparation of *kachu* and unskinned green plantain and all sorts of roots and stalks and leaves boiled together with sand and gravel and excretions of mice. We had to pass the four days of our voyage munching *chana* and *chuda*, and so it was with glee that we devoured even that dish.

Even before we entered the prison, the jailor had given us to understand that we were not permitted to talk to each other or to sit together and that we must be prepared to take the consequences of any breach of that rule.

## THE STRIKE

Now about our work and duties. The Andamans produce coconuts in abundance and all that is government property. So the chief business there is centred round that article. To pound the coir and extract fibres out of it, to prepare again ropes out of those fibres, to grind dry coconut and also mustard in the machine and bring out oil, to make bulbs for *hooka* from the shells—these formed the principal items of work for the prisoners, as has already been said before. Besides, there was a cane workshop where small boys only were made to work.

The most difficult work was coir-pounding and oil-grinding. Barindra and Abinash were invalids amongst us and so were given rope-making, all the rest had to do the coir-pounding. We got up early in the morning, satisfied the demands of nature and, swallowing the *kanyt*, tucked up our *lenguti* and sat down to business. Each one was given the dry husk of twenty coconuts. The husk had first to be placed on a piece of wood and then to be beaten with a wooden hammer till it became soft. Then the outer skin had to be removed. Then it

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was dipped in water and moistened and then again one had to pound it. By sheer pounding all the husk inside dropped off, only the fibres remaining. These fibres had then to be dried in the sun and cleaned. Each one was expected to prepare duly a roll of such fibres weighing one seer.

On the first day, a great deal of time was lost simply to understand the whole affair. Then when we began the thing, we found before long our hands all bruised and blotched. With all my efforts, the whole amount of work I turned out in the end was only quarter of a seer. At three o'clock I went, quaking in all my limbs, like a victim before the altar, to exhibit my work. Well, I got such an exhibition of teeth in return that I was simply petrified. I had never the good habit of silently pocketing an insult. To day I felt almost suffocated when I pictured in my mind that I would have to pass long years in this enemy-land with only hard labour and continual abuse as my lot. And what sort of abuse it was! I read somewhere in a novel by our Sarat Chandra that Hindusthani



surpasses all other languages by its possession of quite the richest vocabulary of abuse. I would entreat him to come once to Port Blair and study Philology there. A veritable well of nectar have the Hindustani, the Pathan and the Beluchi opened there in close conjunction with each other ! Whoever has tasted of it, would find any other human speech quite insipid. Even the *Hadis* and *Bagdis* of our country, if they cultivate it during seven lives, would not be able adequately to master that tongue. I could never have imagined that the horrid admitted of such a multiple variety.

However that may be, we expiated our daily sins in thus pounding the coir, eating the curry of leaves and twigs, and swallowing insults. But the smaller gods that ruled our destiny made life almost unbearable. As the prisons at home have officers called *Male* and *Black Turban*, so the prison of the Black Waters has its *Warder*, *Petty Officer*, *Tindal* and *Jamadar*. It is the convicts who attain to these dignities after passing some 6 or 7 years in prison. In the Andamans it is they who are in charge of everything and have the authority.

They are the bodyguards of the supreme lord, the jailor. And what perfect adepts they are in the art of beating and abusing ! "Ramhl sits a little crosswise in the file, give him two blows on the neck, "Mustapha did not get up immediately he was told to, so pull off his moustache , ' Bikaulla is late in coming from the latrine, apply the baton and unloose the skin of his posterior —such were the beautiful proceedings by which they maintained discipline in the prison

The convicts very often practised a hole in the throat and hid there bits of coins. The purpose of all these tortures was to extract a share of that money. As for us we had absolutely nothing. What were we to do ? Birindra was weak and sickly and was given from the hospital 12 oz of milk every day. In order to escape trouble he had to offer that milk on the altar of the stomach of our Petty Officer, Khoyedad Mian. Khoyedad was a most devout personage, a perfect servant of God. As Birin has already said, that wonderful devotee would pour the milk into his mouth fringed with its clipped

moustache, and exclaim smacking his lips all the while, "The prophat be praised I what a marvelous thing God has created I"

But the most regrettable part of the whole affair was that there was no remedy for these oppressions. For who would bear witness against the guards and court danger? Besides, if you could not prove your charge there was the fear of your being punished in return for instituting a false case. Life is not possible where the protectors themselves are the devourers.

We had passed in this way some 6 or 7 months when a batch of political prisoners arrived from Nasik, Khulna and Allahabad. We thus numbered 20 or 22 in all.

About this time a veritable comet arose in the heavens of our destiny in the person of a new Superintendent. Our fate was sealed. Immediately after his coming he ordered some of us to be engaged in oil-grinding. The oil machine to which Ullaskar was yoked was something like what our oil-men have in our country.

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## THE STRIKE

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the oil-mill during the day and lying flat on our beds dead tired during the night

After that period, the first batch was relieved and the second batch was called to do their turn. Abinash was extremely weak and was in danger of getting tuberculosis. So the former Superintendent had given him remission from all heavy work. But the new Superintendent sent him to the oil mill, without even examining whether he was capable of it or not. Sumin Nandagopal, editor of the "Swarn" of Allahabad, was also put to the same work.

Nandagopal was a Punjabi kshatriya, tall in stature and handsome in appearance. He created a scene when taken to the oil mill. At the very outset he said point-blank, "It will not suit me to turn the mill so quickly as all that". So the machine moved as slowly as possible. Consequently, not even a third of the required amount was done before 10 o'clock. At that hour the ordinary convicts came down, finished their meal in 5 or 6 minutes and then ran up again to continue the work. According to the rules, the time between 10 and 12 was

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meant for dinner and rest, but as a matter of fact the prisoners dared not take rest, lest their day's work should remain undone. They wanted to finish their jobs quickly and then rest with a tranquil heart. But Nandagopal had no such fear. The Petty Officer came and ordered him to finish his meal quickly. Nandagopal smiled a little and began to explain the theories of hygiene, that eating quickly is of great danger to the stomach and that since he had to remain as a guest of the Sarcar for ten years, he could on no account consent to spoil his health and thus bring the Sarcar to ill repute. The matter was reported to the Jailor, who came and saw Nandagopal slowly manipulating his food and leisurely chewing and swallowing each morsel, engaging in the operation each and every one of his 32 teeth. The Jailor fumed and raged and gave him to understand that he would be horse-whipped if the work was not done in due time. Nandagopal smiled again sweetly and very politely repeated the hygienic lesson. Moreover, he said, it was the Govt. that had fixed the hours between 10 and 12 for rest and he would

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be no party to any breach of that rule. Not only that, he would take particular care that the Jailor also did not break that rule. The entire being of the Jailor welled up in gratitude ! He shot up in fury, but thought better of it and retreated with a good grace. Nandagopal took his own time to finish his meal and retired to his cell. The nonplussed Petty Officer thought that now the work would be commenced. But, lo, the incorrigible Nandagopal took up a blanket, spread it on the floor and lay down. Showers of abuse did not in any way disturb his siesta. As regards passive resistance, he was even a Guru to Mahatma Gandhi. He got up, however, at 12 and turned the mill for an hour. When he saw that the oil in the bucket had come up to 15 lbs, he tied up all the rest of the coconuts in the sack and sat down quietly. Only half the work was done, who would now do the rest ? Nandagopal said, "Whoever likes let him do it. I am not a bullock certainly that I should turn the mill the whole day. The ration I get per day is not worth even one anna and a half, then how should I grind 30lbs. of oil ?"



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A tremendous hubbub arose among the authorities. There was a great deal of shouting and threatening. But Nandagopal was as stolid and tranquil as the Immutable Brahman. The Superintendent saw that there was no hope of getting 30 lbs. of oil out of Nandagopal, so he sent the culprit to be shut up in the cell "till further orders".

In the meanwhile Abinash began to break down with working at a mill that was too big for him. After 10 he felt himself too much exhausted to take up the job again. Indu was the strongest among us. It was he who with the assent of the other prisoners came to the help of Abinash and somehow atoned for the sins of the latter.

Still another month passed. In between the Jailer came to a compromise with Nandagopal. He said that if Nandagopal did full work for four days, then he would be entirely released from the mill. Nandagopal agreed. He took the help of others and submitted duly the required amount of work and got free for that time.

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But he could not long enjoy the freedom. A few days afterwards he was again put to a big mill and again he refused to work. The consequences were—fettlers and confinement. A general order was passed that everybody should grind oil for three days. Thus over and above the prospect of an indefinite term of imprisonment was added this daily terror of toiling at the mill. Everybody understood that unless some sort of regular arrangement was made as regards our work, we would have to leave our bodies in Port Blair itself. Punishment was of course, always there in store for us but why should we punish ourselves? So many of us refused this time to work at the mill. Thus the strike began.

The authorities also were not to be behind hand. They also took rigorous measures. The whole prison assumed an air of merry festivity. Punishment was followed by punishment. The first sustenance that was doled out to us was *Kanji* dish for four days along with bar fettlers and handcuffs for 7 days. This delicious dish was nothing but powdered grains of rice boiled in water. It was this that was

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measured out to us twice daily, one lb. each time. And, of course, special precautions were taken that nobody should get anything else in any illicit way. This penal diet, according to jail regulations, was not to be given for more than 4 days. But whether the authorities were too kind to us or whatever the reason might be, Ullaskar, Nandagopal and Hotilal were made to live on that diet for 12 or 13 days. Nandagopal complained about the matter to the Hon'ble Sir Reginald Craddock when the latter visited Port Blair in 1913. But the jail authorities were clever people. They inflicted the punishment all right, but did not note anything to the effect in the *tickets*. The Jailer gave out most barefacedly that the charge was absolutely false. So nothing came of it. A convict can never establish his charge against the Jailer.

Punishments continued unabated. When all kinds of fetters had been tried one by one, we were at last confined to cells. This latter affair had also in its turn a variety of forms. The ordinary convicts, when confined, could come downstairs and have their bath and meal,

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There was also no restriction to their talking to each other. But with regard to ourselves, the orders were that we should not talk to each other and that any body found speaking to us would be punished. So although it was *separate confinement* in name, it was in reality solitary confinement. Many of us had to pass three months or more in this state.

This began to tell upon the health of many. Port Blair was a breeding ground of malaria. The epidemic of fever was a constant factor and now over and above that began dysentery. The authorities thought perhaps it was too much and so decided upon some changes. So a few of us were selected and sent out to the Settlement, on the occasion of the coronation ceremony. Barindra went to the *Engineering file*, that is to say to work as a labourer under a mason. Ullaskar went to dig up earth and make bricks. Some went to the Forest Department to hew wood, others to draw Rickshaws and others again to work at the embankment.

But as fate would have it, this arrangement turned out for us to be from the frying pan into

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the fire. When we were inside the prison, however difficult the work might have been, we could get fixed and full rations from the Govt. and we had not to fear the rain and the storm. But once outside, we were deprived of even that comfort. We had, of course to labour hard from 6 to 10 in the morning and from 1 to 4-30 in the afternoon ; in addition we got roasted in the sun and soaked in the rain. And in Port Blair, besides the fact that the rains lasted seven months in a year, there was the pest of leeches in the forest. That was why many people had tried to run away out of fear of having to work in the forest.

To crown all these sufferings, one did not get the full ration. A good part was stolen and sold in villages. Everybody, from the European officers down to the ordinary convicts, knew of this stealing and yet it could never be prevented. Most of the officials took bribes themselves and so there was no remedy. An ordinary convict would not complain easily in the matter, for he knew perfectly well that it would spell danger for him if he untied his tongue.

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There were four hospitals outside the prison for the convicts. But they were all under the supervision of a Bengali Assistant Surgeon. So the Chief Commissioner, Colonel Browning passed orders to the effect that if we fell ill we should not be allowed in those hospitals but should come back into the prison. It was not certainly pleasant to walk a distance of 5, 7 or 10 miles, shivering all the while with fever and carrying beds and utensils on the shoulder. And moreover, could one expect good treatment even inside the prison? We had to lie down some 21 hours of the day in small rooms attached to the prison hospital. The latrine arrangement, which consisted of a simple pot, was also in the room itself. There were shutters on the rear wall, which served as a good passage for rains to come in, but which did not help proper ventilation in any way. The Jai commission that came in Jan. 1920 to inspect Port Blair spoke very strongly against the arrangement. There will be soon it appears, some effort at amelioration.

However, we had thought so long that once

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outside the prison our situation would improve a little. But that illusion now vanished entirely. We were, as the Bengali saying goes, between a tiger on land and a crocodile in water. Ordinary convicts are released from hard labour, when they become in time warders and Petty Officers and, if they know reading and writing, Munshis. But for us there was no prospect in that way.

So one by one we all of us refused to work outside and came back to the prison.

About this time a very tragic event happened. Indubhushan committed suicide by hanging. He was of a strong and robust constitution and was never frightened by physical labour. But the petty insults of jail life exhausted his patience day by day. He said now and then, "It is impossible for me to pass ten years of my life in this hell". One night he tore his shirt, made a rope out of it and hung himself from the skylight. The Superintendent was telephoned that very night, but he did not turn up till 8 o'clock next morning. Many of the guards who accompanied the jailor to Indu's room on

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that night gave out that there was a piece of writing tied to his *neck ticket*. The truth of the matter cannot be known, the writing was never found. We asked the Jailer about it later on, but he denied the existence of any such thing. Indu's elder brother petitioned the Government for an enquiry. The task was entrusted to the Deputy Commissioner of Port Blair. But nothing came of it. The whole affair somehow ended in oblivion.

As I said, severity of work outside made all come back one by one to the prison. Ullaskar also did the same. He was given brick laying to do in the sun. The Junior Medical Officer of the hospital recommended that Ullaskar was not fit to bear the heat of the sun. But why should the white Overseer take into consideration the advice of a mere Bengali Officer? So Ullaskar had to do the same work as before. Naturally he refused it and returned to the prison saying that it was belittling to one's manhood to work simply out of the fear of punishment, at least he was not the man to do such a thing. So it was ordered that he should be given handcuffs.



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and barfettters for seven days. But those seven days did not pass. On the very first day the Petty Officer on going to take off the handcuffs at 4.30, saw that Ullaskar was senseless with fever and was hanging by the handcuffs. He was immediately sent to the Hospital. The temperature rose to  $105^{\circ}$  in the night. On the next morning it was found that the fever had entirely gone down but Ullaskar was no more Ullaskar. The man who was ever at peace even in the midst of the utmost danger, who never ceased smiling even when he suffered most, was to day insane !

On that day the real nature of a prison revealed itself to us. There was no hope for any one to keep body and soul together and return to his country. Some would die by hanging, others would die by going mad. So we asked ourselves, why should we tamely accept suffering, if death was the only end ? Almost all of us then determined not to do any work until some special arrangement was made for us. Thus on our side we sent the ultimatum and waited with a desperate resolution for the com-

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bat. The authorities also on their side began to bring out the sharpest weapons they had in their armoury and hurl them upon us.

It was a struggle between the elephant and the tiger. A little before this Nanigopal of Chinsura, Pulindas of Dacca and some 3 or 4 others had arrived. Nanigopal was a young boy and yet he was given oil-grinding. He too was forced to join the strike. The authorities locked us up in one *block* separated from the other prisoners and placed choice Pathian warders over us. The ration also was curtailed. And no precaution was overlooked to prevent us from communicating with each other. We might talk in the *latrine*, so a guard waited us even there. But the chain snaps if it is made too tight. It is a vain task to terrorise people into obeying the law, if they have no respect for the law.

We demanded three things chiefly—(1) proper food, (2) release from labour and (3) freedom to associate with each other.

But we were locked up in different cells, each separated from the other by 4 or 5 cells in

between. The outcome was that while formerly we talked low, now we began to shout at the top of our voice. You cannot shut the mouth of a person even if you hang him up by the handcuffs. The authorities caught in us a veritable Tartar. They could not yield to our demands for fear of losing their prestige and yet otherwise the strike would not end. At this critical moment the new Superintendent was transferred and in his place came our old Superintendent. The latter advised the Chief Commissioner to give some of us only light work and send us outside the Jail. Our reply was that we were ready to do work on condition that all of us were sent outside, otherwise we would all come back.

Some 10 or 12 were sent outside with the task of watching the coconut trees. The trees were Govt. property and the guard's duty was to see that the fruits were not stolen. The task was easy. But each of us was posted in an isolated place, so that there could not be any meeting or conversation.

The strike, however, continued inside the

Jail. Some time after Nandalal and Nanigopal were transferred to a smaller Jail in the Viper Isle. There Nanigopal started hunger-strike. So the arrangement that everyone should be sent outside was not carried out in practice.

In the mean while those who were outside struck work en bloc. It took about a month to arrange the strike, as the whereabouts of each and every one had to be investigated and communication established between all.

So when they came back to the prison, each sentenced to three months, they found that the strike within the Jail had almost broken down. Many had joined work out of despair. Nanigopal was brought back to the prison after he had gone on hunger-strike for 4 days. He was forced to take milk by means of a rubber pipe thrust into his nose. Perhaps the authorities were afraid that if he died he might after death speak ill of them! On this occasion it was Nanigopal, Buen and a few others boys who took upon themselves all the sufferings incidental to the strike. Punishment was heaped upon punishment. There was nothing to hope

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for. So one by one everybody broke away from the strike. Only Nanigopal stuck to it, as if he had staked his life on it.

Days passed on. Nanigopal became lean and emaciated like a skeleton. And yet he would not give up his resolve. When he was exhausted and helpless through fasting for more than a month and a half, even then the authorities did not hesitate to hang him up by the handcuffs. The result was that the hunger-strike spread again like wild fire. And however the authorities might try to prevent it, the news about Induhhushan, Ullaskar and Nanigopal reached the country. The press started a vigorous agitation. So the Government was compelled to send Dr. Lukis to make an enquiry. But the report of this doctor has not yet been published, although, as a consequence, Ullaskar was sent over to the lunatic asylum in Madras and the others also heaved a sigh of relief for some time at least.

Nanigopal was also after considerable difficulty persuaded by his friends to take food. A little after this, those who had come from out-

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side with three months imprisonment were also sent out again as their term expired

Thus ended the first period of the Strike

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### CHAPTER VII.

#### THE OUTCOME OF THE STRIKE

**E**VEN death is not a release to the man to whom the fates are hostile. We who remained outside passed our days somehow indifferently. But news reached us shortly that there was disturbance again inside the prison. Continued oppression had forced Nangopal to strike once more. As punishment he was given gunny-cloth to put on, but he refused it. So his shorts were forcibly taken away, he was given gunny shorts and confined in his cell. He however threw away the gunny shorts and sat down quite naked, repeating the *mantram*, "Naked we come out of our mother's womb and naked shall we return. He broke his neck-ticket, would not stand up when the Chief Commis-

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sioner came on visit, nor *salaam* him. If asked what he wanted he replied that he did not want anything—and so on.

Our apprehensions were that the poor boy had gone mad. On enquiry, however, we found that he was perfectly sane and sober. Only he was busy solving the problem why he should be in duty bound to obey laws that the British people had made according to their sweet fancy and with which his own people had nothing to do. His conscience dictated that he should not. Then why should he do it, simply to save his life? What was the value of that life which made life miserable in the very effort to save it?

In answer to his problem we could find nothing better than this only consolation and one hope that even the fiercest master cannot hold in subjection the body of the man whose mind has the seal of freedom imprinted upon it by the hand of God.

But our turn was also coming. About this time the Calcutta Press was carrying on a rather hot discussion about the condition of the political prisoners in the Andamans. The authorities

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thought that it was we who supplied all the information. Of course, it was not possible for us always and in everything to obey the rules and regulations. We had to go here and there for the sake of the stomach in search of fruits or vegetables or some one thing or another. We were also compelled to make secret rendezvous with our friends and comrades, as it was almost impossible for us to associate with ordinary convicts. The authorities did not understand these things or perhaps pretended not to understand and endeavoured to put us into difficulties.

One fine morning a regular campaign of searches was launched upon all on a sudden. All the places where we eat, sit or slept were surrounded by the Police. It amounted however to a comic rehearsal of the Manikola Garden affair, a tempest in a tea pot. Nothing could be secured except a few innocent letters and some poems. But the Chief Commissioner ordered us all to be removed to the prison. Various rumours gradually gained ground to the effect that we had, it seemed, planned to prepare bombs, blow up Port Blair,



capture a Govt. Steamer and escape ; also that the omniscient Chief Commissioner on the advice of a loyal prisoner named Lalmohan Saha had recourse to all these preventive steps in order to save his kingdom from imminent catastrophe. When he came to visit the Jail, we asked him, "What is the matter, Sir ? Why this unwarranted attack upon poor people like us ?" He replied with the most innocent air, "I do not know anything about it. I acted only according to instructions from the India Government."

Well and good, there was no answer to that. But we learnt a few days after that many people outside had been punished because they talked with us and that a Police witness had secured from somewhere a few gramophone pins, some bits of iron and things like that and so had proved beyond any doubt our evil intention of preparing bombs ! Since the time when some innocent people were punished in connexion with the train-wrecking affair at Narayngarh we knew perfectly well all the capacities of the Police. So we asked the authorities

why instead of hitting behind the back they did not try us in open court, if they had proof or reasonable cause for suspicion against us. But to that they turned a deaf ear and did not deign any answer. We could only bite our lips and keep quiet.

A few months after Sir Reginald Craddock came to visit Pook Blur. We thought here was our most well wishing patron. This time something would certainly be done for us. But no sooner had we begun to narrate our woes to him than he revealed himself in his true colours and told us point blank "You were hatching conspiracy while outside."

We replied, "If such is your impression then why did you put on an innocent air and say that you did not know anything when we first put the question to you?" And supposing that you had subsequently proofs of our guilt, then why do you fight shy of instituting an open trial for us? Sir Reginald answered with a twinkle in his eye, "You know, such things can never be proved."

Nanigopal also narrated his whole history.

But the Hon ble Sir Craddock said in reply, "You are an enemy of the Govt you ought to have been shot down" Nani retorted, "If that is so, then why waste money to dress up such useless paraphernalia as laws and courts? you could have immensely shortened the process"

This was the justice that we had Now what were we to do? Unless the Supreme Helper came down and helped us, there was nothing to be done This time His patience too was perhaps exhausted

We again gave up work one by one When the prison authorities were tired of dealing out punishments, they sent for trial in the court those of us who were not transported for life The Deputy Commissioner Mr Lewis, was entrusted with that trial He came a few days before the trial to have a conversation with us and to enquire about the cause of the strike

When he heard of the sort of treatment meted out to us, he said that the India Government did not want that we should be treated any better than the ordinary convicts, no body in Post Blair had any hand in the matter But we

pointed out that we were not allowed even the privileges of the ordinary convicts. These latter, if they knew reading and writing, got decent work in the office, and even if they were illiterate, they could become wardens and Pelly Officers. We were deprived of all these privileges. The others got a monthly pay of 12 As. after the term of 5 years and earned their own living after 10 years. But ours was the fate of eternally rotting within the prison. Mr. Lewis answered that the India Govt. only was responsible for all these arrangements. One of us put the query "Sir, you have no right to do good, have you then only preserved the right to do evil?".

The Sahib laughed and said, "What are we to do? Peace and discipline must be observed in the prison".

"Justly or unjustly discipline must anyhow be observed, this is the upshot of the whole matter, is not it?"

The Sahib did not proffer any answer to that. He knew the entire business perfectly well. But he too was after all a Govt. servant. So he

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get special privileges as regards their work and food. We replied, "Amen, but if within two months we do not see any intimation of those special arrangements then we go our way and make our own special arrangements." Thus the treaty was signed between the two parties and thus ended the second chapter of the Strike.

In a few days everybody was sent back to India excepting Bhandari, Hem Chandra and Ullaskar of Ahpore fame, Pulin Behari and Suresh Chandra of Dacca and the Savarkar brothers and Joshi of Nasik. The intimation of special arrangements also reached us. They were as follows —

- 1) We would have to remain in the prison for 14 years including the remissions. After that we would be released from labour and would enjoy the privileges of a prisoner undergoing simple imprisonment. As for letting us outside the prison, the thing would be considered after 14 years.

- 2) During the period of our stay within the prison we would get all the privileges that

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an ordinary prisoner got outside the prison.\* That is to say, after the expiry of 5 years we would be able to put on *Dhotis* instead of shorts, we would get a monthly allowance of 12 As. in cash and we would get the right of cooking our own food.

3) Every year a report would be sent to the India Government as regards our behaviour. After 10 years the Govt. would consider whether better arrangements could be done for us or not.

4) From now we would enjoy in every way all the rights and privileges of an ordinary convict. Also we would not get any exemption from whipping, on the plea of our being political prisoners

However, this something was better than nothing. We did not forget that our masters could have even refused it altogether.

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## CHAPTER VIII.

## STRIKE AGAIN

WE felt somewhat at ease when the *term* *convicts* were sent back to India. The 6 or 7 that were left behind had 'now to settle down permanently in Port Blair. What was the use then of creating further trouble? As there was no hope of release, it was better to await death and pass days peacefully. So we thought

But peace there could not be to our lot. The Great War broke out in 1914. Its repercussions affected even India and gave birth to the Lahore Conspiracy. As a consequence some 50 men of the Gadar Party had to seek the King's hospitality in Port Blair. Many Sikh soldiers of the Indian Army were also sentenced for political crime. And some 15 or 20 fresh prisoners from Bengal arrived. Thus Port Blair became quite a lively hell, with such a crowd of political prisoners. However none of them, save

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4 or 5, were given oil-grinding. Not that, for that matter, cor-pounding was for them an easy job, but the real trouble was that the Govt. ration was quite insufficient for them. First of all, they were Punjabis, huge and tall and robust, and secondly, they had for a long time been in America and were accustomed to a good quantity of meat. So two *rotis* and one pot of rice hardly served to fill even an insignificant corner of their stomach. And, especially, they were not the people to keep quiet under provocation and insult. Naturally, in a few days relations became strained between them and the authorities.

The quarrel began with Paramananda of Jhansi. On some charge or other, he was taken before the Jailor. The Jailor to show his authority expressed himself as vehemently as he could. Paramananda too retorted back in exactly the same pitch. From words they came to blows. Paramananda was punished with 20 stripes. And the strike began. But it did not last long. The Jailor himself came and cajoled everybody into hoping for better treatment in the future and managed cleverly to break up the Strike.



The seed of discontent, however, did not die. The trouble started afresh a few days after over a very small affair. Usually Sunday is a holiday for the convicts. On that day they are relieved from all duty excepting cleaning their own clothes. But in Port Blair they have to mow the grass in the Jail yard. Now on a holiday they remain shut up in their cells during the whole middle part of the day, and if they are also engaged in mowing the grass in the morning, then the holiday becomes absolutely meaningless to them. So Jagatram who had been the Editor of the *Gadr* in America and some others refused to do the work as a protest. The Superintendent fined them and punished each with 6 month's fetters and solitary cell. No body was, pleased to see such a heavy expiation demanded for a comparatively light crime. Then as days passed, when it was seen that there was no possibility of any amelioration in their condition, many began to give up work. A great to-do was created about this time over another incident. A quarrel broke out between an old Sikh and some of the guards. The former complained

that he was taken by them into a room and was severely beaten. That might be true or not, but, as a matter of fact, within two or three days of the complaint, he was attacked with severe dysentery and had to take shelter in the hospital. Here he developed phthisis and died very shortly. Most of the people believed that violence was the cause of his death, but the authorities of course, denied, the allegation. As no steps were taken about this incident, some 4 or 5 gave up eating in protest. Prithwi Singh was their leader. He was forced to take in milk through his nose. He stood this for 5 months. If it were some other country there would have been a tremendous hue and cry over the matter. But who knew anything about Port Blair? Whom did it concern in any way if a couple or even a dozen of prisoners died there?

Three or four more Sikhs contracted phthisis and died after two or three month's suffering. I have spoken already of Pandit Ramraksha. He gave up eating because his sacred thread was taken away when he entered the prison. He too died of phthisis. Another committed

suicide by swallowing a bit of lead as he found no other way of escape.

Those who died escaped, of course, all trouble. But how miserable they were who went mad and had still to live! Of these latter was Jatish Chandra Pal of the Baleswar Case. He became quite insane while he was locked up in separate confinement. He was sent to the lunatic asylum, but soon he was removed to India. Now he is passing his days in the Bethamptore lunatic asylum.

There was no end to events of this kind. Of whom shall I write and of whom shall I not? There was a Sikh Chhitta Singh by name who had been a teacher in the Khalsa School at Lyalpur. I do not know what crime he committed in India. But in Port Blair he was locked up in a cell from the very beginning. It is said that he attempted to attack the Superintendent some time when the strike trouble was going on. So the warders thrashed him till he fell senseless. And from that time he was shut in a cell and was not taken out till after two years. A cage was made for him by enclosing one corner of a

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veranda with wire-netting. There he had to eat, there to answer the call of nature and there also to sleep. Needless to say, the consequence was that his health broke down and he was almost a dying man. Another Sikh, Amar Singh, had almost the same fate.

Now, when the number of deaths began to increase continually, the authorities seemed to wake up to the gravity of the situation. Jagatram was suffering from brain complaints due to a long term of separate confinement. He and two others were given work in the Press. Bhai Paramanand, a former Professor of the Dayanand College, had never joined any strike and was made a compounder in the hospital. But the Professor could not long enjoy his happiness. His wife published in the papers extracts from a letter of his giving out the condition of the political prisoners. The Chief Commissioner did not feel at all grateful for this and so confined him, without any trial, in the lock-up. Paramanandra pleaded that that letter had duly passed through the hands of the Superintendent. There was no reason to disbelieve him, but all

the same, he did not escape persecution. So now that he found persecution to be the inevitable companion of life, he determined to give up life by not eating. Fortunately he was released shortly after by the King's Proclamation. But as for those who are still rotting in the prison, who knows when their misery will end?

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## CHAPTER IX.

## CAUSES OF DEGENERATION AMONG CONVICTS

Nobody in the country knows anything about the convicts. We have no idea of the fact that owing to our persistent neglect, some lies of people—fallen miserales of our own society—are made to live, in expiation of their sins, in a veritable hell upon this very earth. It is indeed our fortune that rare and great souls come now and then in our midst and do the thinking on our behalf even about the ignorance and misery and sorrow of our mothers and sisters at home. We do not care to think if we

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can help it and even we curse those who do think. So it goes without saying that in the matter of the sinners and criminals of our society we would simply laugh at the idea of paying any heed to them. But the times are now such that we must needs think of these things. Do we not see that our sins in the way of neglecting and despising and oppressing our kith and kin have accumulated to a perilous extent and that it is this which has paralysed all the life-movement of our motherland? The nation must be cured of this disease now or never.

On an average some 1,200 men are transported every year to the Andamans. Among them there are lads of 16 or 17 and old men of over 50 as well, who, by the grace of the medical authorities, are considered quite fit for exile. Our benign government can never be accused of any defect in method and procedure. No convict is sent to the Andamans unless he is *passed* by the Civil Surgeon himself. But that is hardly of any use to the poor creatures concerned. For if the doctor happens to be callous and hard-hearted, he tries to get rid of the affair

everyday dirt and impurities into whatever there is pure in them. The human, the divine in them is gradually uprooted and gives place to the tares of sheer animality. The cause of this degeneration is the band of jailbirds in the Cellular.

As in every other prison in India, in the Cellular also there are three categories of prisoners—men of vicious character, men of good character and, in between, men of a weak and harmless character. For those who are naturally graced with finer and loftier impulses there is no need at all of the regulations and impositions and oppressions of the prison. The inherent beauty of their souls spontaneously unfolds itself as a flower discloses petal after petal. The fiery ordeal of all the sufferings and sorrows of a prison-life serves only to purify and enhance the golden glory within, never to tarnish it. On the other hand, those who from birth and nature gravitate towards things foul, evil and gross, turn absolutely desperate under the goading of persecution and the pressure of the thousand bonds of prison-life. Hand-cuffs, fetters, solitary confinement—nothing in the world has any

terror for them. They consider it heroism to take a whipping. It is simply astounding to see their strength of mind and fearlessness when they suffer punishment for having taken part in the most shameful and heinous crimes. These people remain imprisoned for a year or two in the Cellular and are then let off outside in the settlement. But they come back again. And for that purpose they either thrash somebody or steal or gamble or escape and absent themselves for a few days and then offer themselves up for punishment. Even oil-grinding in the Cellular is an easier task than any work outside, whether in the Forest Department or in the rubber and tea gardens or in the brick-kiln. In the Cellular you have not to suffer from the sun or the rain. Also you can have a full meal here, as a prisoner's ration is not stolen. I have seen veteran thieves coming back into the prison for the tenth or the twelfth time. There is none in Port Blair who is not acquainted with the exploits of such notorious jail-birds as Sera, Murga, Sayid, Mahavira, Palwan, Gore, Charley and others.

But it is the casual offenders, weak-minded



## CAUSES OF DEGENERATION

and harmless creatures, who form the bulk, that is to say, 80 to 90 p. c. of the prisoner population. They come as simple souls, quite unaccustomed to sin or crime, driven by the force of unfortunate circumstances or by their evil destiny. But they return cunning, cruel, avaricious and vicious after all the harsh experiences, the ceaseless punishments and sufferings and want, the continuous contact with what is vile and sordid, that they have to undergo here. The causes that lead to the ruin of a tolerably good soul in the prison may be thus summarised :

(1) The company of veteran and hardened criminals and the spectacle of their vicious and corrupt practices.

(2) Incapacity to do hard labour. When it becomes physically impossible to grind out 30 lbs of oil, one is forced to seek the aid of the more robust ruffians in order to avoid punishment and that means to sell, in return, one's body for the most abject ends.

(3) The punitive regulations based upon the lowest kind of brute force. In the beginning one has the feeling of utmost shame and fear to

be put in handcuffs and fetters or to be stripped naked and whipped. But once this shame and fear are removed the man becomes desperate, blinded with fury and hatred he rushes headlong on the path of evil and corruption. Impotent rage leading to suicide is a very common occurrence in prison.

(4) The demands of want. There is nothing in the world to which one accustomed to smoking does not gradually stoop in order just to get a bit of tobacco. I have seen with my own eyes people, who had no sweets or meat to eat for several years, fall into the most shocking habits for the sake of only a handful of sugar.

(5) Forced celibacy. Rules and regulations cannot repress the natural hungers of the body. In any jail, whether in Port Blair or in India, one has simply to become a prisoner in order to see in how many revolting ways man can pollute his life for the sake of the satisfaction of the appetites, severed as he is from the society of his wife and children and yearning for love and affection and company. The want of home influence, the shutting of all ways of

natural satisfaction turns a man gradually into a sheer brute.

(6) The want of religious life and enlightenment. There are a thousand ways in the prison leading to vice, but not the least arrangement to instil knowledge, to evoke the higher susceptibilities. When the prisoner was a free man in his country he had around him temples and *vigrahas* (idols of gods) his *Guru* and his *Purohit*, religious ceremonies and festivities and countless other things that helped to mould and form his character. But the prison shuts out all these wholesome influences and opens to the unfortunate prisoner the gate of—heaven or hell?

(7) Absence of all incentive to healthy habits. In Indian prisons the prisoners get some privileges if they are neat and clean, behave well, show a good character or do more than the assigned work. All these are taken into account and a remission of 10 or 12 days per month is allowed on the total term. This serves as a strong temptation to reform and correct oneself. But there is no such arrangement for remission in

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Port Blair. Here whatever the prisoners get as such are only on exceptional occasions, perhaps once or twice in 10 years, at the time of some Jubilee or Royal Ceremony.

(8) There is no limit to the term of punishment. Transportation for life in Port Blair means literally life-long transportation, that is to say, till death. The Chief Commissioner, however, has a special prerogative by which he can recommend to the India Government the release of a political or decoity prisoner after the term of 25 years, certifying that the person has during the period led an ideal life and can be remitted the rest of the term. But as a matter of fact some 10 p. c. of these recommendations are returned with the reply that the Honourable Government would keep the particular person under observation for five years more. In some cases a categorical refusal is given and the prisoner is let off within Port Blair itself as an ex-convict. Of the remaining 90 p. c. those only find themselves released in the end who withstand the suicidal atmosphere of Port Blair and endure through this life of suffering and sorrow, of vice

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and pollution. How many can cling to life hoping for this far off will o' the wisp of a release at the end of 20 or 25 years? Besides, there are many prisoners who have more than one life-sentence upon them, that is to say, the total term amounting to 40 or 60 years. I have seen some sentenced to 75 and even 100 years! Who can expect a limit to the doing and daring of these unfortunate people who have no gleam of hope to brighten a never-ending and cheerless prospect? The murders and deaths, the attempts to escape, and above all the moral degradation that takes place in Port Blair are all due to despair and disappointment.

(9) If, over and above these causes, the Jail Officers are cruel and heartless, then all the conditions stand fulfilled for the jail to become an ideal hell. Of course, one may not expect much of love and affection from the higher authorities, but the pity is that even inattention or laziness on their part is sufficient to do all the evil. The Petty Officers and Tindals and Jamadars take advantage of the weakness of their superiors and make the life of the poor prisoner

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miserable and unbearable

(10) And Port Blair is the home of all diseases Malaria diarrhoea dysentery, phthisis, pneumonia typhoid rage here freely People have to bear the burden of a mournful life and toil ceaselessly in sun and rain They are tired and exhausted in mind and body They either await death with a grim determination or they revolt altogether It is impossible here to save a man who is resolved to die All the external conditions are favourable to that end A man keeps his soul here with the utmost difficulty and is required almost to sacrifice life in order to save it It is a tug of war without break or stop between man on one side and death on the other

(11) Finally, once this putrid atmosphere of sin and vice and misery pollutes a man's character, very soon he falls a prey to sordid diseases and becomes completely broken down Words fail to give any idea of the extent which these diseases have reached in Port Blair and the shocking forms which they have taken The prisoners detected with these diseases are pu-

nished and hence they try their best to hide the thing till the very end. Women here do not know what chastity is nor have men any sense of what character is—brute passions rage naked and unbridled in this hell.

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## CHAPTER X.

### SOME SNAP-SHOTS FROM PRISON-LIFE

THE prisoners, thus thrown into a welter of vice and deprived of all hope and expectation, develop most wonderful varieties of character. Repeated punishment and dismal despair make some terribly irritable and absolutely cynical. Mahavira and Sayad were of this type. When we first met Mahavira, he had had whipping already more than half a dozen times. As for handcuffs, fetters, cross-bar or penal diet, the number of times he had suffered them was simply incalculable. In appearance, he was tall, sickly, ungainly, ferocious. The most filthy

abuse was always on his lips; he would mutter to himself day and night. The usual epithets of abuse were not sufficient to give vent to his anger, and he had to coin new ones. Mr. Murry was short and dwarfish, so he was dubbed *Bateria* (*Bater* is a kind of small bird). As for Mr. Barry, he had some hundred names given to him. And all these hallowed names Mahavira used to recite regularly every morning and evening with all sorts of graceful grimaces and ecstatic gestures! He suffered from chronic constipation and complete loss of appetite. And he was firmly convinced that this was due to the same eternal *kachu* leaf that he had had to take during the thirty years of his prison-life and which had all been collected and solidified in his stomach. For a roll of tobacco he fell at the feet of anybody and everybody, showered abuses right and left and even did not let off God and all His brood for having thus thrown him into misery. Whenever any Officer or visitor came to inspect the prison, Mahavira was sure to present himself, of all persons, with his endless complaints and ceaseless



mornings. And finally what a shower of blessings he poured out from his inimitable vocabulary, when he saw that none of his complaints were remedied.

Sayad was an old man, tall in stature, with a white beard, blood-shot eyes and a vicious tongue. He was as clever in flattering as in abusing and quarrelling. All the qualities that Mahavira had, incarnated in him. Besides, he was sometimes quite pleasant and jolly. If he got a bit of tobacco he frisked and jumped about with his eyes almost protruding out in delight and gave a demonstration of his skill in *gaika* (a small baton) play with all sorts of queer gestures and postures. Now and then he thundered out with a terrible cry, "*Bom kali kalkuttauli*" (Victory to Kali, goddess of Calcutta); and when the thought of his cruel fate overwhelmed him he shook the whole Jail with his curses and invectives. He had an insatiable desire for good dishes. He would name in one breath an infinite list of all varieties of drinkable, lickable, munchable dainties—Pilao, Korma, Kopta, Kabab and so on. He would

abuse was always on his lips; he would mutter to himself day and night. The usual epithets of abuse were not sufficient to give vent to his anger, and he had to coin new ones. Mr. Murray was short and dwarfish, so he was dubbed *Bateria* (*Bater* is a kind of small bird). As for Mr. Barry, he had some hundred names given to him. And all these hallowed names Mahavira used to recite regularly every morning and evening with all sorts of graceful grimaces and ecstatic gestures! He suffered from chronic constipation and complete loss of appetite. And he was firmly convinced that this was due to the same eternal *kachu* leaf that he had had to take during the thirty years of his prison-life and which had all been collected and solidified in his stomach. For a roll of tobacco he fell at the feet of anybody and everybody, showered abuses right and left and even did not let off God and all His brood for having thus thrown him into misery. Whenever any Officer or visitor came to inspect the prison, Mahavira was sure to present himself, of all persons, with his endless complaints and ceaseless

moanings. And finally what a shower of blessings he poured out from his inimitable vocabulary, when he saw that none of his complaints were remedied.

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say with heroic gesticulations, "Such things only can Sayad eat and to say that he gets instead *Kachu* leaf and *arhar dal* ! woe is me ! woe is me ! O God ! O the Merciful !" In the block where he was lodged none could have a wink of sleep at night. He would sit down at the closed door of his cell and abuse to his heart's content till somebody came and give him his night's ration, that is to say, a bit of tobacco. At times he would almost bring down the whole prison with his formidable yellings, "O-o-h my cellular darling ! Oh ! Thou scavenger of a Barry ! God curse thee !" The best way of punishing a man was to put him in the neighbouring cell to Sayad's. The people of the block were relieved only when any of the wardens or prisoners, unable to bear any longer the uproar, sent him a roll of *Seokha*. Sometimes, according to the order of the Jailor, water was poured upon his head as soon as he began to shout. It was Sayad's nature to suffer himself and make all others suffer. In the end, however, Mr. Murray took pity on him and released him from the prison by making him a guard in the garden of the

## SOME SNAP-SHOTS FROM PRISON-LIFE

lunatic asylum. We heard that after this act of kindness he left off abusing altogether.

Murga was another celebrity in the Kalapani. His build was that of a Hercules. He was black, hairy, huge and ghostly. His bushy moustache would have quite easily made a good broom-stick. Mr. Barry would, with the simple but of an extra *dabbu* of curd or a few plantains, yoke him to the oil-mill. Murga and his worthy compeer Shera could press out each 80 lbs of oil a day. Formerly the amount of oil required from each prisoner was only 20 lbs. But now, by the grace of Mr. Barry and these two myrmidons of his, the amount was increased to 30 lbs. When the Superintendent saw the example of a man who easily ground 80 lbs, he immediately concluded that every labourer must be capable of at least 30 lbs. It was in this way that the wily Jailor gradually increased the output of each and every item of work. The prisoners enjoy no longer the golden days of yore.

I met in the Jail some two or three young Burmese, aged only 16 or 17 years. The Burmese generally turn here opium-eaters, gamblers

## THE TALE OF MY EXILE

and vicious characters. But among them To-ah, Fon-ahn and another whose name I forget were really good souls. But of course that was no reason why they should not kill one or two people every year. The Pathans and the Punjabis were nothing short of brutes and always pursued the young and fair and pretty Burmans. And when these refused to be drawn into sinning, they conspired with the Tindals and Petty Officers and brought endless trouble upon the poor innocent folk. All the prisoners have tobacco or some such contraband article in their secret possession and anybody can get anybody punished by playing the traitor. It was easy also to punish a prisoner by stealing a part of his daily output of work. Besides the Court was such that it did not hesitate to chastise any man sent up on a false accusation of a guilt or intimidation. Only I saw Mr Murray trying to do a little bit of justice. Otherwise, it was all the justice of the sort meted out by our old *kajis*. Fon-ahn was hauled up several times for murder. Afterwards we got him employed in the press as a paper-cutter. The good treatment that he receiv-

## SOME SNAP-SHOTS FROM PRISON-LIFE

ed there made him pass a year safely without any case put up against him and he was released from the prison. God only knows what is in store for him now outside.

Kartik, a cobbler by caste, was a dacoit. Stout of heart, strong of body, full of enthusiasm and battle, he took to dacoity as a game. In other respects he was a very kindly soul. The man whom he loved, he would serve with his life. One day Upen delivered to him a long lecture in the usual style on Hindu-Moslem Unity. He heard the whole thing quietly and dittoed it, but in the end put in a question, "What the little master says is all perfectly true, but can he tell me what would be the fate of these people who could never in their whole life utter even for once the sweet name of Hari ? "

He was not pleased, if instead of being called *kartik*, he was given the more gentlemanly form of his name *kartik chandra*. There was nothing that he could not do for his little master. He rendered all sorts of kindly services to Hemda, when the latter was employed in the forest.

## THE TALE OF MY EXILE

He had no equal in angling.

Love and affection are all here, but very much deformed. Examples of one man sacrificing himself for the sake of another are to be found every day, but that sacrifice is polluted with the mire of vicious passion.

There are even saintly souls here. Mathura Singh worked for 10 or 12 years in the prison and rose gradually from a Petty Officer to a Tindal. A more pious and gentle nature can hardly be met. I never heard a single word of abuse from his lips. His body did not imbibe a tinge of sin in this domain of evil. Sometimes indeed he threatened to strike people and upraised his thirty-pounder of a fist, but as it landed it transformed itself into a caress and he got things done, as it were, by magic. All his threats and menaces were like the vain demonstration of an autumnal cloud. He had infinite sympathy for the convicts. He was ever filled with trepidation and his eyes rolled wide in fear of what the Sahib might or might not say. He could not take food or water without reading every day the Ramayana of Tulsidas. He was absolutely



simple, meek and innocent like a child. To lock up a man like him in a prison amounts almost to infanticide. In the end he was let off on ticket of leave, that is to say, he got the privilege of earning his livelihood freely to some extent.

The Gate-keeper of the Cellular Jail was a man of Sagar, named Takat Sing. He had not much of English education, but seemed nevertheless to be highly cultured. He could understand the great problems of the day, whether of India or of the world in general. He had been sentenced to transportation, because a servant or labourer of his committed a murder in connexion with a dispute about land or property. He was a good soul and belonged to a high family, but the effects of sorrow and suffering were now coming upon him gradually. You cannot uplift a man by punishing him. It is a greater crime than murder to corrupt a pure and innocent man by throwing him into the very heart of vice and sin under the excuse of punishment. The Penal Code knows only to penalise, everything there is rigorously punitive. A man may commit murder all on a sudden under severe provoca-

tion or uncontrollable impulse, but he gets transportation for life. Does he merit it? In America the mental growth of a criminal is taken into consideration when punishment is awarded. A man may be 40 years old, but his intellectual stature may be that of a child of ten; in such a case, surely the punishment should be proportionately less heavy. Besides, it is a grave responsibility to take charge of a corrupt character. If I cannot reform him and render him his good character, what right have I to despoil him of his personal liberty? The day has certainly come when these things should be thought over and the prison rules framed accordingly anew.

Criminals of deficient or undeveloped mentality should be put in charge of sympathetic, noble-hearted and cultured men. But the Andaman arrangements do quite the opposite thing. Here the prisoners who are cunning and careful are never caught and their jail-tickets remain clean, that is to say, possess no black-mark due to any case or accusation. Generally it is these people who are later on raised to the

dignity of a Petty officer or Tindal or Jamadar. The Superintendent, when considering the promotion of a prisoner, does not look into his real character, but sees only whether there is any case or conviction against him in the jail history sheet.

Mirza Khan was a Pathan. In the course of my Bohemian life I have travelled over many lands and seen much of men and things, but I have rarely met a more cunning creature than he. He was a Petty officer, finally became a Jamadar and ruled many years over the Cellular with a mighty sway. In Satanism and viciousness Golam Rasul was a mere ignorant child to him. Uncle Rasul might have sat at his feet for 10 years as a disciple and yet would have hardly reached the level of that red-bearded, red-faced, smooth-tongued Pathan. There were no prisoners so turbulent that Mirza could not put them down, if ever there were they could be counted as one or two. "If God protects none can destroy, and if God destroys none can protect." The same thing could be said of Mirza during his rule in the Andamans. By his astute-

ness and by flattery he held Mr. Barry under his thumb and did what he liked. In his reign the only people that were happy were the Pathans and those who gave themselves completely up to him. For the rest it was a terrible purgatory. At the instance of Mr. Barry or whenever he wanted to take vengeance, he could in the twinkling of an eye concoct cases against the most innocent, and as for the most daring and indomitable he heaped upon them punishment upon punishment, beat them, harrassed them till they were completely crushed. He was usually amiable towards the strong, but ferocious towards the weak. He intercepted the secret correspondence of the political prisoners, got them punished on flimsy technical grounds and it was by these services that he secured his *Jamadar*-ship. When he approached any of us with a friendly smile, sweetly addressing us "Babuj", it was certain that evil days were in store for the poor Babuj. We were in perpetual dread as to whose turn it would be next to fall a prey to Mirza Khan.

The tyrant and the bully have generally a

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weakness for flattery. The only way of escape from Mirza was to accost him as *Jamadarji*, saluam him every moment and also to chat with Mr. Barry in his presence. All things were permissible to one who talked to Mr. Barry. There was another way and that was to have a strict eye over him. He was given to vice and bribe-taking and he tried his best never to molest one whom he knew to be in the know. If you ever gave him a hint that you were acquainted with his secrets, he would immediately come to buy you off with lemon or tobacco or some such thing.

There was no end to the number of such tyrants and bullies among the Tindals and Petty officers and Jamadars. The prisoners, surrounded as they were with such a host of enemies, had always to be ready with means, fair or foul, to defend themselves. The one perpetual anxiety that haunted them day and night was how to save their life. And what a miserable life it was, when day and night you had to smile anyhow a wooden smile and do a thousand obeisances to your many masters !

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The higher officials, either the Superintendent or the Chief Commissioner, do not know of these little griefs of the everyday life of a prisoner. They come only at times to inspect and do not live with the poor creatures. The subordinate officers, like the Overseer, know many things, but they too have their secrets. In the fear that their own delinquencies might be exposed they simply shut their eyes to those of others. They connive at everything inconvenient. An under officer like Mr. Duggon, who had really a kind heart could not do anything alone by himself and so had to remain quiet. He could see to justice only in respect of cases that came up to him personally. Then he tried his best to act up to his conscience and threatened the wicked and gave protection to the weak as far as it lay in him.

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## CHAPTER XI.

### A SUMMARY OF SORROWS.

THE Jail commission appointed by the Government of India came to visit Port Blair in January, 1920. I give, below the gist of the memorial that was submitted to it on behalf of the political prisoners:—

(1) Port Blair is not fit for the habitation of prisoners for many reasons.

(a) The climate here is very unhealthy. It is the home of malaria. Besides, dysentery and phthisis also find here a very congenial atmosphere. The percentage of deaths is more than double that of India.

(b) In no civilised country there is any place like this that is used even for transportation. Visitors, either official or non-official, do not come here generally. The means of remedy that are open in the jails in India are absolutely wanting here.

(c) The Government of India incur a great loss for the upkeep of Port Blair. It will

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ever be a burden to the Government to maintain for the sake of a comparatively small number of prisoners such a tremendous army of guards, policemen, sentries and various other officers

(2) If the purpose of punishment is to reform character, then certainly that end has not been achieved in Port Blair. Men who are already vicious become doubly so after coming here. So severe is the iron rod of rule here that people have perforce to learn lying and cheating simply for the sake of saving their skin. And everybody is too much occupied with himself. To come to the help of others means courting punishment. So the nobler qualities of man not only do not find any play but are rooted out altogether. In other countries efforts are made to teach and educate the prisoners so that they may become better men. But here there is absolutely nothing of the kind. The system that is prevalent here is only another form of the old slave trade.

(3) No kind of differentiation is made between prisoner and prisoner. Those who are



punished for smaller crimes are made to live with veteran and hardened criminals. As a result, they too contract all the viciousness of the latter.

(4) Character is usually formed through the influences of family and social life. The prisoners are deprived of any such amenities. They cannot even write letters to their homes more than once in a year. Affection and sympathy and all the softer sentiments dry up very soon in their hearts. They even cease to care about their future release. The prisoners condemned to transportation for life are not let off even after 20 or 25 years. It is no wonder that people whose future is one mass of dismal darkness should either become inert, insensible, machine-like objects or turn cruel and violent and vicious.

(5) And yet although they toil as slaves, they do not enjoy the fruit of their labour. The Government condemns a murderer to transportation for life and extracts an infinite amount of work out of him. But not the least portion of the benefit goes either to the family of the murderer

not want to come to Port Blair and live with them. And then the women who are lodged in prison as convicts are of such a type that many shrink from building a home with them. Almost a new race has evolved from the alliance of convicts and convicts and their moral sense of family and social life is simply revolting. The only remedy of all these evils is to make some arrangement that the prisoners may after a certain term get back their wives and children and live with them.

(9) Those who after ten years become "self-supporters in Government Service" get in the beginning a monthly salary of Rs. 7 only. Out of this amount the sum of 8 annas is deducted every month for lodging in the Government barrack. With the remaining six rupees and a half one has to meet all expenses as regards food, clothing and every other necessity. Under such circumstances it is quite natural for the prisoners to take recourse to stealing. Of course they are punished when caught. But who is really responsible for this crime and vice of theirs? The current rate of monthly allowance

was fixed long ago ; since then prices of all things have gone up at least three times, But there is none who cares to give even a chance thought to the difficulties of the prisoners. They are merely machines to turn out work for the Sarcar. They are not men.

(10) There is a considerable number of boy prisoners in Port Blair whose ages vary from 17 or 18 to 20 or 22. They are kept under the charge of Petty Officers and Tindals who are mostly unmarried and have no character. The revolting oppressions they have to suffer at the hands of these latter cannot be described in any decent human language. The very shame of it often prevents them from complaining to the authorities ; and even if they do, it is more often than not crying in the wilderness.

If really any improvement is desired, the first thing to be done is to break up the establishment in Port Blair. If it is desired to reform the character of the prisoners, then family life must be introduced among them. But the wives and children of ordinary prisoners would not like to come over to Port Blair. And yet

society is absolutely necessary, without it no moral amelioration is possible

If the Settlement is continued in Port Blair, the mere financial difficulty would make it impossible to look to the necessities of health and hygiene. The former Senior Medical Officer Dr. Farnside and the present Officer Dr. Murry have both of them recommended the abandoning of Port Blair as a penal settlement. As a matter of fact, no useful purpose is served by keeping up Port Blair, save perhaps maintaining a few unnecessary and unworthy officials.

## POLITICAL PRISONERS

The political prisoners have to suffer much more than the ordinary prisoners. The standing orders of the Government are that they should be treated exactly in the same way as the latter. The consequences have been that they not only have all the ills of the latter to their account but do not enjoy many of the rights and privileges which the latter are allowed. An ordinary prisoner, if he knows reading and writing,

## A SUMMARY OF SORROWS

may in the end go outside the Jail and get the work of a munshi or a clerk. But the politicals are shut up all through within the prison. They are all educated men, but most of them have to pass their days in making ropes or pounding coir.

The classification of the ordinary convicts is not at all applicable to the political prisoners. These should be grouped separately and given better treatment. To force and coerce and oppress them is useful to neither party. The illiterate do not suffer at all for want of books and papers. But it is not the case with political prisoners. And yet the Government has made no arrangement as regards the supply of what is a necessity to the literate. The few books that were collected in Port Blair were the property of the political prisoners. The Government did not spend a single pie over them.

The political prisoners are prohibited from talking to each other. So if more than one fall ill at the same time, they are not taken to the hospital but are kept locked up in separate cells. There is no arrangement for proper ventilation

## THE TALE OF MY EXILE

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the more I was bent upon tearing off her covering, the greater was the obstinacy of my beloved to disclose herself. You will perhaps ask me, "Were you not afraid of death?" Indeed I was and it was therefore that tears flooded my eyes, through all that sunshine of happiness, when I listened to the order of hanging. It seemed to me that this time God was going to take away by force everything—my soul and mind and body—what I could not in any way give up to Him. It was ever my lot to harbour in my bosom the ragings of a thousand confusing emotions at the same time. I was shaking in fear, my heart was beating fast and yet a delight of entire consecration welled up into tears. My sorrow-stricken and prostrate heart was lamenting, "O God of Love and Beauty I I yearn for the touch and smell and sight of thy infinite playthings of this world. Do not put out the light that yet brightens my earthly home. I shall not find relief in death, for now is my time of sweet honey-moon. The hour is not yet come when my insatiate desires would have found repose in thee and when dying would be sweet with thy Presence trans-



fused in my soul". And my soul at the same time, full of renunciation and ascetism, in a yogic equanimity, chanted in an opposite strain, "As bubbles of water rise out of water and die down in water even so the mind melts away in nothingness". It was, as it were, that the same house witnessed at the same time a sombre funeral and a joyous festivity. I do not know if anybody else had a similar experience, but thus it was with me.

Life demanded me still and so one day I learnt that my death sentence had been commuted to transportation and that I must give up hoping for death and prepare myself, in return, to be hurried alive. Then the curtain lifted again over a new enactment of life's double strain of pleasure and pain on the stage of the Andamans. Those who dwell in pleasure and seek pleasure most certainly feel an unbearable pain if all on a sudden a crash and catastrophe befalls them. Their whole soul cries out for the happiness that is no more. But the calamity that struck us down was of our own making. It was we ourselves who opened the way for the evil and in a

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way welcomed it. A pain that we invited on ourselves, however lacerating, could not naturally overwhelm us. The more we suffered, the more it made us smile. The course of true love is never indeed smooth. The dangers and difficulties of the way tend an added zest to the venturing spirit. And yet pain is pain and we felt the suffering. No doubt, we were free-lances, though without the lance, but we were creatures of flesh and blood.

Our sorrows were many. The greatest of them was the want of company. The orders were strict that we should not talk to each other, even though we might be close together and in the same block. What a wail we smothered in our hearts when we walked together, eat together and worked together and yet could not open our mouths ! We could indeed steal glances, whisper a half-uttered word now and then, but all that served only to increase our suffering. Whenever we were caught unawares in our unlawful conversation, Uncle Khoyedad thundered out, "you Bengalees, be a bit modest !" It was a task, indeed, always to be "modest" in this way.

We accused the gods and chafed and murmured within, "This is not what we expected. We admit that we rushed to the deliverance of our country, but is that a sufficient reason that we should be ever confronted with the grimaces and threats of these whiskered Kabul duennas? And who the deuce possesses such an infinite fund of modesty as to be able to draw upon it interminably at a moment's notice every now and then?" As if we were no better than the living baggage that is known in Hindu Society as the divinely modest and obedient and devoted consort! Could the fates be more perverse? That was how we first experienced the woes and terrors of the *Purdah*.

The food difficulty was not so very painful in the beginning. But as days wore on, the dismal monotony of the same dish every day—rice and *dal* and *Kachu* leaf—began to tell upon our nerves. The farther we left behind the atmosphere of the motherland and the more we inhaled the air of the Andamans, the greater was our repulsion to food and the keener our discomfort. It was the mere sense of duty and the cruel necessity of hunger that made us

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eat. The amount of moderation and control that we achieved was a thing certainly to be coveted even by the Yogis.

Poor famine-stricken India also might have taken a wholesome lesson from our example. It is said that the cow of a Brahmin eats very little but yields plentifully both milk and dung. We too were something belonging to the same category. A prisoner eats little, but toils quadruple-fold. The daily ration per man is as follows—Rice 6 oz. flour for *roti* 5 oz. *dal* 2 oz. salt 1 dram, oil  $\frac{1}{2}$  dram and vegetables 8 oz. No distinction is made here between prisoner and prisoner. A ravenous giant like Kailas and a grass hopper like me were both given the same quantity of food.

The only hopeful feature of the situation was that one did not require much eating in this country. A few days' communion with the air and water of Port Blair is sufficient to uplift you to the supreme stage of dyspepsia. And whatever hunger and desire are left, disappear altogether when you know of the marvellous banquet that awaits you! So one

## A PERSONAL WORD

can easily imagine what a delight it was for us to get, after a year or two of the same old routine, any variation in the shape of sweets or some thing else however trifling. One day a Pathan warder, Sayad Jabber by name, while on duty at night, brought me secretly a dish of meat. I do not know whether any food prepared by the famous Draupadi herself, could have been as savoury as that dish, with such a gusto did I devour it. Another day a veteran convict named Charlie gave me to eat ordinary *roti* smeared with sugar and fresh coconut oil. I can say quite honestly that even the *Mihdana* of Burdwan never tasted to me so sweet. After the life of suffering and want that we led in the Andamans the lot of the rich rolling in luxury and surfeited with daily banquets appeared to us really pitiable. There are none else who have been so cruelly deprived of the joy of the palate. Even kings do not know the heavenly delight that a pauper feels when in the midst of his life-long misery he gets an occasion or two to taste a dainty dish. Hunger is the best sauce—that is a simple truth that is always true.

## THE TALE OF MY EXILE

Another thing which poisons life in the Andamans is the want of freedom. What a joy it was for us, when after a confinement of two years in that huge pile of bricks, called a prison, we found ourselves free one day, outside in the Settlement, on the occasion of the King's Coronation ! I drank in with my insatiate eyes, like a passionate lover, the beautiful vision of a Nature dressed in green and displaying her mountain tresses.

The jail authorities know very well what it is for a man to lose his liberty. It is for this reason that a convict has been deprived of freedom, and again when that freedom is restored to him it is done slowly, gradually, step by step through a long process of fiery ordeal, making him, as it were, pay for each dole. In the beginning the man is shut up day and night in separate confinement. Then he is let off in a verandah fenced with iron railings. After that comes a larger freedom in the yard and in the workshop. And finally when the period of imprisonment is gone through, one is free outside in the settlement. Now there are no walls around, no night-

mare of Petty Officers and warders and Salubs at your heels to terrorise you. Yet even then, on leave-days and at night, you have to come back to be shut up in the barrack and present yourself at the roll-calls.

After a life of two years' strictly guarded confinement, even that partial freedom in the wide bosom of Nature was very sweet to me. It was a balm to my soul, so cruelly deprived of all joy, to be able, on days of leave, to wander about as I pleased in the quiet tranquillity of the green woodlands. And yet that delight was not all delight, poisoned as it was with the thought that I must return soon to my daily toils and pains.

Generally a prisoner when he has worked outside for five years becomes a Tindal or Petty Officer and draws a monthly pay. We had never the fortune of enjoying such a large freedom. Not only that, even after undergoing imprisonment and compulsory labour for 10 years, we were not promoted to the "first class" and had not the joy of being self supporters on Re. 1 a month. The-self-supporters who are let off on

## THE TALE OF MY EXILE

ticket of leave can marry, if they like, from among the female convicts. It is not even illegal for them to choose their partners from the free population provided the Chief Commissioner grants a permit. Also the free convicts who already have their wives and children at home can call them over here and live with them. If the sudden miracle of our release did not happen we would have got perhaps the right of self-supporting. As a matter of fact, something was being arranged to that effect.

Through all this sorrow and suffering and oppression and despair the only companions we dearly cherished were books. Nowadays, I hear, third class convicts can send and receive letters three times a year. But in our time we were allowed to write only once a year and it was also only once a year that we received news of our friends and relatives. Labourer convicts can get from their homes cloths, shirts, utensils, books, slates and other articles that are not very costly. But we were given books only, if any thing else came it was stocked in the godown. Those of us who had the means at home could



get some 20 or 25 books per year. All the books were kept in the Central Tower and every Sunday morning one book was given to each for a week. In the end, however, we exchanged books as often as we liked with the help of the warders and managed even to possess more than one book at a time. It was a regular festive occasion whenever any one of us got a parcel from home. And how we planned and plotted to steal books and what a joy it was for us when we succeeded!

The struggle for life made us *pukka* thieves in many other ways. We would steal salt, chili, and tamarind from the kitchen and coconut from Number Seven. What a delicious *chutney* we made out of these ingredients! Even half-baked bread and mere rice when mixed with that thing could taste like heaven's ambrosia! It became almost a second nature to us to steal and eat the tender coconut, and drink its milk. And of course there was no end to the amount of torn rags and coconut oil we stole in order to clean our iron plates and dishes that had the nasty habit of always getting rusted. We got over the trouble only when we were allowed monthly

## THE TALE OF MY EXILE

pay and could buy brass utensils.

After about six years we got permission to cook our food ourselves. Our kitchen was a hut with tinned roof, about 5 cubits long and 3 cubits wide. Cooked rice, *dal* and *roti* were supplied to us from the prison kitchen. We prepared only vegetables, egg or fish that we bought in the market. So gradually our daily meal came to be after all not a bad thing. We four of us got 12 oz. of milk per head from the Sircar. That was used for our morning and afternoon tea. The last two years of our stay we prepared even *filao*, *luchi*, meat and whatever else we liked on the Durga Puja day and the Christmas day. Hem Chandra and Upen were star-artists in cookery. So it was they who did the daily cooking. And what surprises they flung on me every day with their novel and unheard of preparations! I cooked only on Sundays. We formed even a vegetable garden round about our kitchen with *chili* plants, mint and gourd-creeper. Our time for cooking was between 10 and 12.

There is joy in a picnic, because it is a novelty and a matter of only once on an occasion.

But only the dumb toilers of our zenana know and we also knew to a certain extent what it is daily to shed water through your eyes and nose in lighting the oven, to get half cooked yourself in cooking and after that to rub and clean the utensils. Then only we learnt that one and one do not make a couple but that the wife forms the major portion, the husband is only a fraction. Upen used to heave deep sighs and lament, "Alas, only the Goswamis are happy in Bengal. I once saw a Goswami sitting under a tree, in a beatific and ecstatic pose. One *sevadasi* (a woman devotee) of his was massaging him with oil; for it was time for the master to take his bath. Another was arranging and preparing the materials for cooking and a third was blowing with her beautiful lips at the oven and was busy cooking; for the master should be served with the offerings of the devoted. And yet half a dozen more had gone out into the village singing and begging alms, for the master required *ganya*, *malpo* (cakes) and also *btoga* for the night". I do not know what sociology says about it, but that polygamy is of immense

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utility in Port Blair would be readily conceded when it is remembered that there after the day's heavy and crushing toll one has to do one's own bed, one has to massage one's own limbs.

And yet our delight was not small even in the midst of such sorrows. For it is a thing that belongs to one's own self. One may gather it as much as one likes from the inexhaustible fund that is within and drink of it to one's hearts' content. Not that, however, the lishes of sorrow were an illusion to us. Even the Maya of Vedanta did not always explain them away, so often had they a solemn ring of reality about them. But a tree requires for its growth not only the touch of the gentle spring, but the rude shock of storm and rain and the scalding of the summer heat. Man remains frail and weak and ill developed if he has an easy and even life. The hammer of God that builds up a soul in divine strength and might is one of the supreme realities.

THE END.

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